

S E R M O N S

227 e 26
ON THE

Following SUBJECTS,

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The Divine Goodness the firm Foundation of our Trust.	The Nature of Charity, and its Importance.
The Nature and Reasonableness of religious Trust.	The Case and Duty of an offending Brother.
A particular Providence explained and proved.	Scripture Doctrine of Repentance.
Abiding with God in our several Stations.	Characters of the Penitent and the Righteous.
Paul's Reasoning with Felix.	Motives to Repentance.
Self-Dedication to God.	

BY THE LATE REVEREND

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D. D. and F. R. and A. S. S.

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2 E R M O N 2

OF THE

Following SUBJECTS

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2. The History of the Kingdom of France
3. The History of the Kingdom of Spain
4. The History of the Kingdom of Portugal
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SER-

S E R M O N I.

The divine Goodness the sole Foundation of our Trust.

PSALM xxxvi. 7.

*How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God!
therefore the children of men put their trust
under the shadow of thy wings.*

TH E R E is no one subject that is more copiously described, or more frequently insisted on, in the sacred writings, than the goodness and mercy of God; nor any thing that can be of greater importance to the peace and happiness of mankind, than their being well-established in the truth of this doctrine: Because there can be no possible comfort and satisfaction to their minds, arising from the belief of a God, unless he is in himself, and is believed by us to be supremely and infinitely good. There is somewhat extremely distressing and afflictive, in the scheme of *Atheism*, which takes away an intelligent mind from the government of the world, and instead of subjecting all things to a wise and equitable

providence, gives them absolutely up to the undirected caprice of chance, or the unalterable laws of a severe and inexorable fate. In such a situation it is impossible there can be any just foundation for hope, since *chance* can never be governed by rules of *reason*—nor *fate* ever bend to considerations of *equity* and *goodness*. Thus circumstanced life would be perpetually fluctuating, subject to a thousand perplexities; and under all the uncertainties and anxieties attending it would not have one single reflection, that could inspire a rational fortitude and patience of mind, and cause men to possess and enjoy themselves with dignity and comfort. But there is a consideration which I think *more dreadful than this*.

If we could suppose an eternal, infinitely wise and powerful being, presiding over the world, and having the uncontrouled management of all persons and things, whose nature was destitute of goodness, and of whose character, mercy and loving kindness, were not essential ingredients; it would be impossible not to tremble under the imagination and belief of such a power: Or to place any confidence or hope whatsoever, under the conduct of such an administration and government. The only notion we could form of it, would be that of a *supreme* and *universal tyranny*; and the sole expectation we could derive from it, would be a more entire and substantial misery and destruction, inflicted with a severity equal to the reach of infinite and irresistible power; and diversified in various forms

forms and shapes, according to the measures and means suggested by the most extensive knowledge and wisdom. Was such an opinion of God as this founded in truth, and the prevailing sentiment of mankind, it would be impossible that he could be the object of their veneration and esteem; that they could delight themselves in him, or place on him their supreme affection; or that there could be any place for the practice of true and rational religion. Men might worship as *slaves*, but could not do it as *children*, they might submit from terror, but not from choice, and obey from necessity one whom they could not resist; but not willingly and from the dictates of their hearts: Because upon this supposition there could be no foundation of love, nor any room for the exercise of it.

And therefore as all the divine perfections have their best description in divine *revelation*, the goodness of God is *peculiarly illustrated* in it, and almost all the sacred pen-men have been directed to *celebrate* this attribute *above* all others—and God himself seems to have been peculiarly solicitous to reveal himself in all the riches of his grace, that men might be established beyond all doubt in the belief of this principle;—and that all the worship and *obedience* they pay him, might be their *choice* and *pleasure*, as proceeding from love; and this trust and hope in him habitual and constant, as being founded in the persuasion of eternal, infinite, and unchangeable goodness;—and it is the belief of this prevailing affection in God

that hath encouraged good men in all ages, to place their confidence in him, and under all the evils they experience, and for all the good they want, to have their recourse to him, who is the father of mercies, the source of all happiness, and the giver of every good and perfect gift. *How excellent is thy loving kindness! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings* *. And of himself he declares, *I am like a green olive tree in the house of my God. I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.*

What I propose from these words, is to shew you,

I. That the *only foundation of trust in God* is the consideration of *his mercy and goodness*; and,

II. That the *goodness and mercy of God* will abundantly warrant the most *unshaken and habitual trust* in him.

I. That the *only foundation of a firm and rational trust in God* is the apprehension and belief, that *goodness and mercy* is an *essential attribute* and *unalterable perfection* of his nature. The condition of human nature is, as every one feels it, indigent, and liable to perpetual wants; wants that he finds himself incapable of supplying, and yet such as must be relieved, in order to the preservation of his being and the continuance of his happiness and comfort. If the external *provision* for life be abundant, yet a man hath not in his own power the *capacity*

* Psalm lli. 8.

for enjoying them ; which is liable to be lost by a thousand unfriendly accidents, which he hath not the prudence and sagacity to foresee ; nor the means at his own command effectually to guard against. The whole constitution and frame of nature is, as to us, precarious and uncertain, and the continuance of no state of life is to be absolutely depended on. Every expectation without us may fail. The clouds of heaven may cease to drop down fatness, and refuse to give the former and the latter rain. Unseasonable and scorching heats may destroy all the fruits of the earth, and render the labour of the husbandman in vain. And should these fruits come almost to maturity, and awaken in the owner the largest hopes of plenty ; immoderate rains may sweep them away with a torrent, or resistless storms level them with the ground, or an invading enemy seize them by violence. Riches themselves are not proof against time and chance, which happen to all men, and honours are not always secure and lasting to the possessors. We need the protection and guardianship of a power superior to ourselves, to render our external prosperity durable and stable, to defend us from accident and danger, and even to bear us harmless from ourselves, from the follies, indiscretions, rashnesses, and vices, to which we are liable, and the unhappy and destructive consequences that attend them. If all these circumstances should proceed well, and continue favourable to us ; our *reason* may *fail* us, our *health* may *forsake* us ; and we

may in an instant be rendered incapable of relishing any single ingredient of external prosperity we possess. In a word, the whole life of man is a state of perpetual *dependance* and *want*; so that he every day needs to be supported at another's expence and provision, and he must instantly perish, if the daily source of his supplies should fail or forsake him,—this is his natural condition.

Consider him in a *moral* view, and he is rather *more* indigent and helpless, and liable to more substantial and durable calamities. He is born *untaught* and destitute of all rational furniture; and without assistance would remain ignorant and void of understanding. He is an *offender* against even what the light of nature instructs him to practise, needs mercy and forgiveness for his numerous errors; and yet cannot fix the sure method of obtaining it, nor confer any obligation upon the being he hath offended, to grant it. He is, when under the influence of corrupt habits and passions, extremely *corrupt* and degenerate, and yet is frequently *insensible* of his disease and misery, unacquainted with the most certain and effectual method of his recovery: And yet must be absolutely ruined unless the cure be seasonably and effectually applied. He knows himself perpetually *liable to death*, fears the approach of it, dreads the consequences attending it, cannot secure himself from the arrest of it, cannot *redeem himself from the power of it*, is *uncertain* what the change of condition will be into which it introduces him, and
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whatever be the lot assigned him after it, cannot alter one single circumstance attending it.

Now supposing there be *no* kind and benevolent being, that exercises a constant, wise and gracious providence over him, and all things; What encouragement can there be for hope and trust under all these uncertainties of condition, and amidst these numerous wants and fears that would perpetually invade and surround us? If the presiding power was *infinitely discerning*, and could know all our infirmities, dangers and necessities; yet if *destitute of goodness*, that perfection would be wanting which alone could make infinite knowledge of any service and benefit to us, bend it to the consideration of our wants, suggest to it the thought and method for our relief, and prompt it to a timely and proper application and execution of them. Knowledge without goodness would only furnish expedients for more exquisite and perfect schemes of mischief; and afford the means of rendering the evils of mankind more numerous and destructive. Especially if in such a being *infinite power* was joined with infinite knowledge, enabling him to execute what his understanding would suggest, and to effect whatever a relentless, severe and inexorable disposition could prefer. Such a consideration would absolutely destroy every possibility of hope; and entirely prevent all the pleasing satisfactions arising from confidence and trust.

Could we suppose ourselves the subjects of such a being and Lord, absolutely destitute of

all compassion, wholly unaffected with the wants of men, and void of all inclinations to relieve and succour them; how deep, how substantial, how remediless must our misery be! What should we not have to fear? what endless anxieties would possess us, what daily terrors would excruciate and torment us? Through the infirmity of our nature, and the temptations of the world, we all know that in many things we offend; but how truly dreadful is the prospect of an unforgiving inexorable sovereign, armed with infinite power, able to protract our beings, and inflict on us the most aggravated vengeance. Who could ever honour or be reconciled to the thought of him? who could willingly subject himself to him? What one single benefit could we expect from it? what one want could we hope to be relieved under? what one offence or error of conduct could we reasonably think would ever be forgiven us? Was this our case, an eternal gloom must hang over our minds, life would perpetually pass on under the deepest melancholy; every day would forebode new evils in the present state, and imagination of evils to come after death would be endless and insupportable. *Unwilling to live, we should be afraid to die,* and our minds would be perpetually on the rack through the abhorrence of life, and the just dread of the miseries that might succeed it.

Separate goodness from the character of God, and there is no single prospect of happiness or comfort

comfort before us, and the belief of his being and government would be the most dreadful and afflictive burthen in the whole world. But *add this* to his other perfections, the scene instantly changes, the gloom dissipates, and the breast of every good man receives the most solid and durable satisfaction. This infinite goodness of God

1. Renders the *belief* of his *being* truly *pleasing* and *comfortable*, places him in the most amiable point of view, and makes his character infinitely delightful. How truly *re-verend* is that *name*, which comprehends in it absolute and unmixed rectitude and perfection! How high must the veneration be that is due to the *greatest* and *best* of beings! What strong affection, what fervency of love must he challenge and deserve, whose nature and property is ever to do good, wherever he can find a suitable object for the exercise of goodness! and who can be kind and gracious whenever it is consistent with the dictates of wisdom, and the just and righteous ends of his administration and government? What inward sentiments of gratitude, what warm expressions of thankfulness and praise will be due to him, when his providence is consider'd as the cause of all the innumerable blessings that fill Heaven and earth! And his bounty and goodness as the indefectible source of the infinitely various kinds of good, that enrich the creatures which he hath called into being! How naturally will every well disposed mind draw near to him, refer itself to his pleasure, com-
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mit all its wants and cares to his provision; when the consideration of infinite goodness attracts them, and they are powerfully drawn to him by this pleasing reflection, that he is the *God of love and dwells in love!* How will the soul adore and admire him, when attentive to this belief, that all the generosity, benevolence, affection and kindness that are in the most excellent and best of other beings is originally from him; and yet when all united is but a shadow and imperfect copy, and faint resemblance of his! That *his thoughts and ways of mercy are above them all, as the Heavens are high above the earth, yea, that they are nothing, and less than nothing and vanity* when compared with his. The thought of his infinite power, his unerring wisdom, his perfect rectitude of nature, his supreme dominion, and universal kingdom, is truly *awful*, and must strike the mind with an holy reverence and fear; but when I consider that this infinitely blessed and glorious being is the author of my nature, *my Father, and my Friend, who made me for happiness,* and intends, by all the methods of his providence, to *promote* it; who offers himself to me as *my portion and exceeding great reward*, and bids me hope for immortal blessings, and the most substantial and satisfying proofs of his favour: O! how *pleasing* is the *awe* that spreads itself through the mind, when grace and mercy take away the terror of it: And the thought of never failing compassion attempers and softens it! The belief of a God, whose character it is that *he is good*

to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works; cloathed with compassion, and seated on a throne of eternal grace, attentive to all his creatures wants; and whose high pleasure is to support and relieve them; this is the most refreshing and delightful thought that can enter into the mind of man. And the disposition of that person must be the most unnatural, criminal and disordered, who doth not glory and rejoice in the consideration of it. But,

2. As the consideration of God's loving kindness is that which renders the belief of his being infinitely grateful and pleasing; so it makes his *providence* and *government* unspeakably *desirable*, the object of every reasonable being's wish, and what must yield him the most perfect contentment, tranquillity, and peace of mind, when he attends to the serious consideration and belief of it. For from the administration of such a being, it is impossible there can proceed any thing unreasonable, severe, and cruel, any appointments contrary to equity, any laws arbitrary and rigorous, or any punishment inconsistent with justice and the maxims and dictates of generosity and compassion. And there is no reasonable being in the universe, who is in that disposition he ought to be, who answers the end of his formation, and acts agreeable to the essential laws of his own nature, that can have any just reason to fear the consequence of such a providence, or to be apprehensive that any
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hurtful and destructive effects can ever arise to himself or others from it.

On the contrary, he hath every thing to hope for, which the general welfare and order, and the safety and happiness of individuals can render expedient and necessary. Because where *perfect benevolence* hath the *perpetual direction* of wisdom and power, the great employment of *wisdom* cannot but be to *find out suitable objects*, on which goodness may exert itself, and *various methods* how to diversify the fruits of it: And power will be used to render the *measures* of wisdom and goodness universally *effectual*.

It is true of the scanty and confined measures of goodness that *men* possess, that the *liberal soul deviseth liberal things*, and is habitually employed in consulting, how he may gratify the generous dictates of his heart. But place infinite wisdom, goodness and power at the head of the universe, commit the reins of government to a being possessed of all these perfections, suppose him absolutely happy in his nature, incapable of want, above the possibility of receiving any addition to his original fulness; entirely free from passion, anger, ill-will, envy, malice, and all selfish and partial affections; conceive of him as possessed of all the kind, generous, benevolent dispositions, as acquainted with every possible method of doing good, and having it irresistibly in his power to confer all kinds of benefits and blessings; as presiding over the whole, and

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tenderly careful of every individual: And must not *such a providence* be the *happiness of the world*, and an unspeakable benefit to every single creature that exists in it? Must not every thoughtful being *rejoice and triumph*, that *God reigns*, and *doth whatever it pleases him, in the armies of Heaven*, and among the inhabitants of the earth; that there is no resisting his hand, nor frustrating the execution of his designs? Can any thing be really amiss in his administration, or can the thought of his government give a moment's distress and pain to a reflecting and rightly formed mind? Yea, must it not be the effectual cure of every anxiety, the most substantial relief under all the uncertainties and distresses of our beings, and afford the utmost satisfaction and support, under every burthen that actually oppresses us, and under every evil that threatens and approaches us? For it is impossible any thing he doth, or that comes to pass by his order or appointment, can be *really and upon the whole evil*; it must have a kind intention, have the character of goodness instampt upon it, and be designed to promote some excellent and valuable purpose; nor can there be any evil which may arise from the free agency of any of his creatures, and which they may attempt through the abuse of their active powers, which he will not be able to over-rule, and which shall not eventually be so directed, as to bring about some event conducive to the *general welfare*, or the *special benefit* of those whom he *approves and favours*. In this view,

view, the government of God is the source of innumerable benefits to the world; the order and peace of which cannot be maintained and secured without government, nor fail of the most effectual support under the direction of an infinitely wise and good one. And,

3. This *loving kindness* and mercy of God, as it renders his *providence truly desirable* in itself, so it *naturally excites* all the *most pleasing passions* and *affections* of our souls, creates that *confidence* and *hope* in it, which settles and establishes the mind, and awakens the lively expectation of receiving that protection and constant supply, on which the continuance of our being and perpetuity of our happiness depend. It is impossible that infinite goodness can be reflected on, as an essential and immutable principle in the great governor of the world, without attracting the hope of those who are under it, and are sensible how much they want the protection, guidance and benefit of it. The heart will be strongly attracted to it, grow warm with expectation of good from it, and forebode to itself the gratification of all its best and most important desires. It will immediately perceive that there is no necessary good too great to be beyond the grant of divine benevolence; and that all the substantial blessings of the gospel of Christ, pardon and grace and eternal life, are worthy the promise of him who is the permanent and living source of all perfection and happiness. But this will be particularly considered in the next discourse, in the mean time let us all *establish*
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ourselves in the *belief* of this character of God as infinitely kind and good, *take care* not to *forfeit* our interest in his favour; and in the chearful and constant discharge of our proper duty, take the comfort that arises from the consideration of the providence and government of God, and make the resolution of the *Psalmist* our own, as for us, *we will trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.*

SERMON

SERMON II.

The Goodness of God a sure Foundation of our Trust.

PSALM XXXvi. 7.

*How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God!
therefore the children of men put their trust
under the shadow of thy wings.*

I Have observed to you before, that the *only* foundation of a rational and chearful trust in God, is the consideration of his *mercy and goodness*. As our condition of being is subject to perpetual wants and dangers, we have need of a more powerful protection than our own, and of a supply equally large and constant, with the daily returning wants of our nature. But as the exercise and effects of goodness are impossible, without real goodness and benevolence of disposition, we can have no dependence or expectation from any being whatsoever, who is incapable of sentiments of compassion, and void of that generosity and benignity of temper, without which there can be no fixed motive to confer benefits and favours; God therefore becomes the ob-
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ject of our confidence and trust, as he is the *Father of mercy* and the *God of grace*; and as goodness is an essential and immutable part of his character. It is this that renders the *thought* of his *being* delightful, that makes his *providence* and *government* *desirable* and *beneficial*; and that naturally *excites* the most *pleasing passions* and affections, and awakens the lively *expectation* of receiving at his hands every thing needful for life and godliness: And I am now to shew you,

II. That the *goodness of God* will *justify all our largest hopes* and expectations from him, and *deserves* the most *intire* and *cheerful trust* and confidence that we can place in him. Known benevolence and goodness in men, encourage the application of others to them, and the secret assurance that they shall succeed in their desires, is the very reason that determines us to make such application to them. Goodness is in its nature compassionate and tender, it is communicative and liberal, its necessary tendency is to confer benefits and diffuse happiness, according to its ability and power. Without this disposition, goodness is a mere empty name, and all pretence to it, detestable hypocrisy; as the apostle argues, with respect to human charity and the pretence to it. *If a brother or sister be naked *, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things that are needful to*

* James ii. 15, 16.

the body; what doth it profit? What do all these kind speeches and external expressions of concern for their relief signify, if the hand be withheld, and what they want be wholly denied them? So in like manner, with respect to the *divine goodness*. Could we suppose it to be only a mere *fruitless* compassion and *ineffectual* wish, a disposition not strong and powerful enough to become active, and exert itself in correspondent fruits, What would it profit? What one reasonable expectation could be derived from it, or in what single instance could it minister to the welfare of mankind? But as it is impossible to conceive of goodness in disposition, without an answerable propensity actually to do good; or to conceive of such a disposition in an infinite being, without an equal power to act agreeable to the dictates and tendency of it; so the placing an *intire, unlimited trust* in God, is a *rational* and *becoming* instance of honour and homage paid to him, and equally conducive to the welfare and comfort of our beings. For consider,

1. The *goodness of God is supreme*, and infinitely superior to that of all created beings; consequently, our *supreme* and *ultimate trust* and confidence is due to, and should be placed in him. This was the general belief of the heathens themselves, who stiled their king and sovereign of gods and men, *Optimus Maximus, best and greatest*; and is the doctrine expressly taught by our *blessed Lord*, who in answer to one who stiled him *good master*, replied;

Why callest thou me good, there is none good but one, that is God.* That is, comparatively, none in the highest and most perfect sense, none originally, supremely good, but God; none, that hath the ability and disposition to be good like him. Inferior beings have their measures and degrees of goodness, kind and benevolent dispositions, implanted in them by God who formed them, and which they cannot utterly deface and extinguish, without an absolute and entire corruption and perversion of their nature. And according as this disposition prevails, there is a degree of trust and confidence which they deserve, and which indeed we cannot help placing in them. A *good prince*, justly merits the esteem of his subjects, who may reasonably expect all the blessings of a kind and equitable administration and government from him. It would be unnatural ingratitude in children to treat *good parents* with diffidence, and not to assure themselves of every favour from them which they could prudently give. *Friendship* is formed upon mutual confidence and trust, and cannot subsist a moment, but upon this foundation. But as all *created* goodness is limited and imperfect, may decay by time, may be weakened by change of interest and tempers, there is *no absolute confidence* to be placed in it; nor can we entirely and at all events depend on the continuance or good effects of it. If the kind and benevolent disposition should always re-

* Matt. xix. 17.

main the same, their abilities to do good may be lessened, and wholly fail them; for all external circumstances are precarious, and the warmest benevolence may be frequently straitened, and rendered destitute of the power to gratify its own best and kindest inclinations. And therefore no external condition of outward prosperity in ourselves, or others, is ever to be looked on as so stable and firm, as to be beyond the reach of providence and accident to destroy. And therefore though according to human views, riches and plenty, may be deemed some security against the wants and necessities of life, and those who are blessed with them, should so far regard them, as to live without all anxiety as to future wants, and cheerfully and thankfully enjoy the bounties of providence; yet should they not imagine that *their mountain is so strong, as that it cannot be moved, nor trust in uncertain riches*: But as they who remember, that all these sources of good may be dried up, and all earthly perfection may wholly fail them, should enjoy what they have without confidence and vanity, and without presumptuously assuring themselves that their prosperity shall be perpetual and constant. And whatever security they may promise themselves, it should not be from any dependence on human goodness, or their own outward circumstances in life, which may all entirely disappoint them; but from the gracious disposals of God's over-ruling goodness, and the hope of a continual share in his protection and favour. *Second* causes and instrumental

mental means of happiness should not be wholly overlooked; but the *supreme, ultimate* trust of the soul be directed to, and fixed on *God*, who alone is worthy to be the object of it, and who only can prevent our final disappointment. Infinite goodness alone deserves this instance of homage, and can only justify, answer, and reward it. Again,

2. As the *goodness of God* is *supreme*, and therefore challenges our *ultimate trust*, so it is an *immutable perfection*, and deserves our *habitual and constant* trust. *I am like a green olive tree in the house of God †*, flourishing like an olive tree in its full verdure and strength, planted in the courts of God's house; *I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever*. Nothing shall shake my confidence in him, nor ever cause my expectation from his mercy to fail; and the *immutable* nature and perfections of God, are a just reason for this resolution. For goodness in him, is an eternal, fixed principle, that admits of no variation, that is subject to no decay, and time and circumstances can never alter it. Neither his disposition or power to do good can ever cease; whilst his creatures continue he can never want objects on which to exercise his mercy; his original fulness can never be exhausted; whilst he is possessed of infinite wisdom, he can never be at a loss for methods to communicate the effects of it; whilst all power belongs to him, he will continue able to confer the most sub-

† Psalm lii. 8.

stantial favours, and act agreeable to the most liberal dictates of his benevolence. As his absolute rectitude of nature can never be impaired, nor his love and approbation of righteousness ever lessen; the faithful and upright will never cease to be the objects of his peculiar care, nor to be distinguished by peculiar grants and instances of goodness; *He is the Father of lights* †, the great source of all peace, and comfort and happiness; *every good gift, and every perfect gift, comes from him, and with him, is no variableness or shadow of turning*: No defect in the light that he communicates, nothing that can obscure or shadow over the glory of his goodness, no variation and change of the kind and gracious dispositions in him; so that the foundation of good men's hope in God, is steadfast and immutable, as his being and nature, and the failure of their trust in him, must ever be unreasonable and sinful. Again,

3. *The goodness of God is universal*, extending to all persons, and to all circumstances of their being; capable of exerting itself in all instances and seasons, and of bestowing every kind of blessing, every possible ingredient of happiness in every situation and condition in life, answerable to every one's nature, and to every kind of necessity to which he can be at any time whatsoever subject. And therefore it is a solid foundation for trusting in him for every good thing we need, in every danger that

† James i. 17.

we are liable to, and in every alteration of our state in the present life, and for those more substantial and durable blessings, which are the portion and inheritance of the life and world to come. *My God will supply all your wants, according to the riches of his glory in Christ* †. As he formed us the creatures that we are, it is impossible he should be a stranger to any of those capacities which he himself has given us. As he knows the imperfection and dependence of our natures, none of our wants can ever be a secret, or be ever concealed from him. As he is acquainted with every thing that passes in our hearts, all our most secret desires and wishes are fully understood by him. As he is the universal proprietor, the disposal of all good is absolutely at his pleasure. As he clearly discerns what relief we need, in every circumstance of our being, the fittest season for granting it, and has the means in his own hand, how to convey and bestow it; and never wants the disposition to assist and succour us in every emergency of life; the eye should be directed to him, and the desires of our hearts for all needed grace, to help us in every time of our distress, should be offered to him with the utmost cheerfulness, and with a full assurance, that he will withhold no really good thing from us. Whether our pressures be of a spiritual or temporal kind, whether our wants relate to life, or

† Philip. iv. 19.

godliness; whether we are solicitous for the blessings of time, or eternity; our *refuge* should be in the *universal Father and Friend*. Nothing should tempt us, to question his ability or readiness to grant us what is proper, or cause us to despair of that seasonable supply of mercy that he knows we need. Under all worldly distresses, his good providence can support and provide for us; under melancholy and darkness of mind, the Father of lights can disperse the gloom, and cause the day spring of peace and comfort to arise in our breasts. Under temptations he can animate and strengthen us; under the consciousness of sin and guilt, he can *heal the wounded spirit* and revive us with the voice of pardon. Under the acknowledged corruption of our nature, he can renew its lost rectitude, and restore all the enfeebled powers of reason. Under the fears of death, he can arm with fortitude and resignation, and inspire the glorious hope of a blessed immortality. So that there is no want so pressing which divine goodness cannot relieve; no difficulty so great, out of which that cannot extricate us; no desire so large, which that cannot satisfy; no blessing of that worth and value, which his benevolence will refuse to bestow on such as are capable of receiving it, and where it is becoming his character to vouchsafe it. And what is peculiarly suitable to our condition, no unworthiness so aggravated, over which his grace will not delight to triumph, where there is a becoming sense, and an humble acknowledgement of it; and

and therefore, it is impossible that there can be any supposable circumstance of our being, in which we are rightly prepared for the mercy we want, but we may reasonably and cheerfully expect it, and trust in infinite goodness and mercy for the grant of it. Again,

4. It is a farther support of our trust and confidence in God, that *goodness* is the *prevailing character* impressed on *all his works*, appears uppermost in *every* individual being, and is clearly legible in the *whole frame* of nature and constitution of things. The marks of *wisdom* lie more *hidden* from our perception, and are not often to be discerned without deep penetration, and curious search into the structure and formation of the objects we behold. In consequence of this indeed, there arise the most surprizing and astonishing instances of the prudence and wisdom of the divine architect. But the indications of *goodness* discover *themselves* in the first and most cursory view of things; and as no worthy reason can be assigned for the original production of the world by the power of the Creator, but the rich overflowings of his eternal goodness, and his fixed purpose to communicate the effects of it; so it is impossible but that must be the original motive to creation. For the *whole frame* is so constituted, as that the moment it is beheld, it demonstrates a design of goodness, and immediately excites all the pleasing passions and affections of our nature in the contemplation of it. And *every individual* is also *formed for happiness*, and endowed with the necessary powers

powers to secure it in greater or lesser instances. Now this affords a very substantial reason for trust in God, because this demonstrates the *nature and intention* of that *universal providence* which God exercises over all things; and shews that it must be conformable to the original scheme of goodness, of which creation was the beginning. For it is impossible, and a contradiction in terms to suppose, that the *design of creation and providence* can be *different and repugnant* to each other; and that providence can be intended and managed so as to defeat the kind and benevolent purpose of creation, because that would be to make God oppose and vary from himself, to charge him with inconstancy and mutability, and the greatest defect in wisdom or in goodness, or rather in both. But if the providence and government of God be, in the whole of it, intended to secure the happiness of God's creatures, so far as they are capable of, and fit for it; religious and virtuous persons have then the utmost security that their welfare shall be effectually provided for, and that the whole conduct of providence shall tend finally to secure and promote it. Or in scripture language, *that all things shall work together for their good*. And therefore they may assure themselves with an unshaken confidence and trust, that *all the paths of God towards them, shall be mercy and truth*; and that no circumstance shall in the end *separate them from his love*, nor disappoint their hopes in his power and goodness. But,

5. Though

5. Though we cannot suppose any opposition of passions, or contrariety of perfections in God, that can solicit and draw him into contradictory and inconsistent measures, or that demand to be illustrated and glorified to the obscuring or prejudice of others; yet we may truly say, that the *exercise of goodness is peculiarly pleasing to God*, and that this is that divine attribute which he delights to exalt, and in which he would be peculiarly known and regarded by all his reasonable creatures. This is an ancient observation of a very wise and great man, the royal Psalmist, who declares; *I will worship towards thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving kindness and for thy truth; for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name* *. That is, demonstrated and glorified thy *veracity and fidelity* in accomplishing the *purposes and promises* of thy *goodness*, above all the other characters and perfections of thy nature. And of this the *universal experience* of mankind testifies the truth. For though *judgments* do *sometimes* come abroad in the world, and God makes himself, on particular occasions, known by the *terrible things in righteousness* which he executes upon heinous and incorrigible offenders, yet the *proofs of goodness* are *perpetual and constant*. Judgments God inflicts with a very sparing hand, and on particular occasions, which shews that in this he acts as it were with reluctance and unwillingness: But the favours he confers are innumerable,

merable, and the effects of his bounty never cease: An abundant proof, that in conferring these, he acts with the utmost willingness, and that *in these things he delights*. And by consequence, the firm and constant expectation of mercy and grace from God is well founded; because it is expecting that God will do what is peculiarly grateful to him, and what he delights to exercise himself in more, than in any other kind of works whatsoever. And if the things we trust in God to confer on us, be such as are best for us to receive, and fit for God to give; and we are rightly prepared and disposed for the mercy, our confidence in him will not be disappointed. Again,

6. The *whole gospel revelation*, is calculated to *manifest the riches of the grace of God*, and establish our hope and trust in the divine compassion and goodness. There is but little comparatively said of the power and holiness, and justice, and anger of God. These attributes are, as it were, but occasionally mentioned, and but seldom touched on. No, though so much is said of these more awful perfections as is sufficient to strike us with awe, and excite in us a holy fear and caution not to incur his displeasure; yet unquestionably the governing intention of the gospel, is to represent to us the divine goodness in the strongest and most affecting manner, and to bring mankind into a firm belief and opinion of, and cheerful dependence on the free, undeserved, sovereign mercies of God. This is spoken
of

of in almost every page of the sacred writings, the most encouraging descriptions are given of it, the noblest promises set before us, as the fruits, invaluable privileges are bestowed in proof of it, and the whole scheme of redemption is founded on, and receives all its security from the divine benevolence and grace. The *whole* of our blessed Saviour's Mediation, every thing that he did, every character that he sustains, hath the same tendency, to illustrate and proclaim this favourite reigning attribute, the loving kindness of God. He came into the world, *full of grace*, to reveal the eternal counsels of mercy, and upon an errand of eternal *salvation*. He died, as the great *proof* of God's *reconcilable* nature; and to render the actual exercise of mercy, consistent with the views, and reconcilable with the honour and interest of moral government. And his being *set forth as the propitiation for sin*, was intended to be a *perpetual assurance* to the world, that *God in him was reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to those who believe in him their trespasses*. His *intercession* and advocacy in Heaven, hath the *same intention* to create in us full persuasion and confidence, that neither the meanness of our persons, nor the sinfulness of our condition, that neither the number nor aggravation of our sins, nor our many forfeitures of the divine favour, shall be any bar to our obtaining mercy; if we will be persuaded to *repent and turn unto God*, and *seek for refuge* to the help that is set before us: And to assure us beyond all possibility

bility of doubt of obtaining mercy and grace to help us in every time of need. The mercy of God is the grand representation of the gospel, of which every principle and doctrine in it, is a clear manifestation, illustration and substantial proof.

Now how powerful are the motives arising from hence, for sincere christians to place the *utmost confidence* in God, and to assure their hearts of finding grace and favour with him? Why so many representations of mercy? Why all those solemn declarations of grace? Why such numerous promises of divine goodness; but to fill the hearts of sinful men with hope, and to inspire their breasts with the largest expectations of receiving from God, every thing essential and necessary to their true happiness? Would God have sent his only Son to proclaim his goodness to the world, to declare the sovereign riches of his mercy, and to offer to their acceptance, the most valuable fruits and effects of it; had it not been his intention to persuade sinners of his tender affection and gracious intentions towards them, and to prevent every jealousy and suspicion of their being finally rejected from his favour? Why would he have fixed the terms of their acceptance, but to prevail on sinners to submit to them; that being reconciled to God, and *justified by faith*, they might have strong consolation, by placing the strongest dependence on the promises and assurances he hath given them? If God hath given his Son to obtain eternal redemption for us;

us ; how undeniable is the inference, how firm should be our persuasion, *that God will with him freely give us all things ?* And how justly may we, from the consideration of the abundant provision that he hath made for our recovery and salvation, by Jesus Christ, *glory in God*, as our reconciled Father and assured Friend : And dismissing all apprehensions and fears of being rejected by this best of beings, take up the words of the inspired Apostle, and with the utmost cheerfulness and fullest confidence of soul, say, with him ; *Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are ours ; for we are Christ's, and Christ is God's **. And thus have I largely described the *nature* of this *trust in God*, which is the *privilege* and *duty* of every sincere christian, and the foundation of which, is in the eternal and unchangeable mercy and goodness of God : And from what has been said on this subject, we may infer,

1. How truly *miserable* and *unhappy* they must be, who *put themselves out of the reach* of the rich mercy of God, render themselves incapable of the effects of the divine goodness, and destroy the foundation of their hope and trust in it. This confidence in God, and assurance of his mercy, is not the privilege of all men without exception ; some there are who reject the mercy of God against them-

* 1 Cor. iii. 22.

themselves, and render themselves absolutely void of all share and interest in it; whose trust is presumption and self delusion, and whose *hope shall perish and be cut off as the spider's web*, and end in the most dreadful confusion and disappointment: Not from the unwillingness of God to shew them mercy, nor from any exclusion from the effects of it, independent of their own incapacity to receive it, and their obstinately persisting to reject it. No, they are only their own enemies, and if I may be allowed the expression, put it out of the power of God, as the wise and righteous governor of the world, to extend to them the grace and favour they need. The offers of mercy, though they are universal and unlimited, yet as it became the wisdom and rectitude of God to do, are made for the encouragement of repentance, to *persuade sinners to become reconciled* to him, to consecrate themselves to his fear, to give themselves to a life of religion and virtue, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness. Unless the promises of God's grace, and the accounts of his mercy in Christ, produce these effects, they are of no consequence nor benefit to the sinner; he hath no right to make any application of them to himself, nor to take any comfort to his own soul from the consideration of them. If there be any one here, who is determined to gratify the corrupt affections and passions of his heart, and encourages himself from the general accounts of God's goodness to persist in his vices; infinite, eternal,
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immutable, sovereign goodness, conveys no peace and comfort to such a one. The most pleasing descriptions of divine benevolence cannot affect thy state, nor give thee any rational relief, under the consideration of thy sinfulness and guilt. Thou hast things of quite another nature to attend to, and what should employ thy mind is; how *dreadful* a thing it is, *to fall into the hands of the living God*. Thou shouldest remember how *by thy hardness and impenitence of heart, thou art treasuring up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*; and shouldest dwell in thy thoughts upon that *indignation and wrath, that tribulation and anguish*, that shall hereafter be poured out upon all who obey not the truth, and upon every soul of man that doth evil. But dare not to lay thy *presumptuous* hand upon the gospel covenant and hope; nor meddle with promises that are peculiar and sacred, to penitent and converted sinners. These promises will indeed afford even thee this consolation, that if thou wilt forsake thy sins, and suffer the *riches of God's goodness, his forbearance, and long suffering to lead thee to repentance*; thou also shalt have thy lot and portion in them: But without this, even infinite mercy will not save thee, nor the God of all grace shew thee any final compassion. And what condition can be more truly wretched, and substantially miserable, than his, who is *excluded from all share in the*

unchangeable goodness of the best of beings, and puts himself out of his protection; who hath all blessings in time and eternity, to confer, and whose pleasure and delightful work is to do good, and extend mercy to all his creatures.

2. This demonstrates the *unreasonableness of despair* under the gospel constitution. There is but one circumstance in the world, that can justly lead to such a disposition; and that is, an *obstinate* and incurable purpose to persist in a sinful course, and pursue the criminal gratifications of it. Such a temper doth indeed bid the sinner despair of mercy, and root up the very foundation of all hope in God. But hast thou a right conviction of the evil of sin, doth thy heart breathe after a deliverance from it, dost thou pray and strive against the power and dominion of it? Is it thy governing concern, *Lord, what shall I do to be saved?* and wouldest thou rather have a share in the gospel redemption by Jesus Christ, than in all earthly treasures? If thou art conscious to these sentiments, every thing in reason and revelation bids thee hope in God, and leads thee to stay thyself on the eternal and immutable goodness of God. But it may be objected, "I know myself exceeding unworthy, and that my sins are numerous and highly aggravated." What then? Who amongst the children of men are not unworthy, and who doth not stand in need of mercy as well as thyself?

thyself? What dost thou want to plead merit with God? If not thou mayest have recourse to grace and goodness as well as others; and is not that mercy that hath triumphed over the sins and guilt of so many heinous offenders, sufficient for the forgiveness of thine? If thy solicitude for thy salvation, and thy sorrow for sin, and thy sense of thine own unworthiness, which thou complaineest and art afraid of, be real, this itself is a strong argument, that *there is mercy with God* even for thee. And thou shouldest remember, that tenderness of conscience, contriteness of heart, dread of God's displeasure, and the fear of final condemnation, are not marks of a reprobate condition, and that God hath forsaken thee. Look round about thee upon the sinners of the age in which thou livest that are walking in the broad way to damnation, and thou wilt find them of a very different complexion and temper. They *make a mock of sin*, they ridicule the fear of God, and the terrors of a future state, as vain superstition; and as panicks, that have no reason and reality to support them. Such as these are the men that God bids despair, and to whom his word speaks everlasting terror. But to the *humble and contrite heart, that trembles at his word, that thirsts after righteousness*, that longs for the sanctifying, comforting influences of his Spirit, that would willingly share in his salvation, and sacrifice

every thing to his favour; to such a one, God speaks everlasting peace, and the language of the Saviour to him is, *Let not thy heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me. I am able to save thee to the uttermost, my blood cleanseth thee from all sins*; I have paid thy ransom, I am thy all powerful advocate, and will be thy security from the wrath to come.

3. How *thankful* should we be, for the accounts given us in the *gospel revelation*, of the *benevolence, goodness, and rich mercy of God*; and for the *foundation* hereby laid for our *confidence and trust* in him. The fairest views of the divine goodness that are any where to be found, are in the sacred writings; and the descriptions therein given of it, are every way suitable to our condition, as dependent, indigent, and sinful creatures; such as are most proper to convey to us the most substantial relief, and to afford us the most grateful satisfaction and help, in every time of need. The representation of God; as *forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sins*, as *waiting to be gracious*, as *averse to methods of severity*, and *slow to anger*, as *reconciling the world to himself*, as engaged by promise to give *grace and wisdom liberally to all that ask it*, as extending his providential care to every individual, perpetually watchful over our best interest, and directing all events for our final happiness; as offering *glory, honour, and immortality*, as a grand motive to a patient
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continuance in well doing, and as determined to bestow eternal life upon all the reformed and recovered part of mankind.

I say, these accounts of God's goodness are no where to be met with, but in the records of *divine revelation*. *Human reason* did not soar to these heights, nor *philosophy* ever dictate these sacred and pleasing doctrines; and yet it is this account of the divine goodness alone, that can thoroughly reconcile us to the belief of God's being, and make the providence of God a flowing source of satisfaction and joy to a serious and thoughtful mind. And therefore, as this knowledge of God is entirely owing to the *gospel revelation*, it should create in us the *biggest esteem* for it, and cause us to *receive* and *welcome* it, as an invaluable treasure bestowed upon the world, and diligently to *study* it, that *through patience and comfort of the scriptures* we might *have hope*.

4. And lastly, learn from this account of the divine goodness to *establish your hearts by trust in him*, and in every circumstance and condition of your being, let your souls rest and take refuge in him, as your only security, protection and defence. This habitual confidence in God will be of the greatest use and benefit to all who live in the daily exercise of it. It is a continual guard upon the heart, and naturally tends to render men fearful and cautious of their conduct; and to make them wary and circumspect in their

whole behaviour. For our trust in God, must be more or less firm and comfortable, as the testimony of conscience is either in our favour, or against us. All wilful guilt makes God appear surrounded with terror, and awakens just suspicions of his displeasure; and when men are going to engage in any thing criminal, the heart can never stay itself on God, nor take pleasure in the consideration that his eye is upon us; nor ever promise itself his approbation and blessing. And therefore he who knows the pleasure and joy that flows from trust in God, will be cautious of doing any thing that he knows to be a forfeiture of his favour, and would rob him of all his best and most delightful expectations from him. If temptations should befall him, trust in God will arm him with resolution, fortify him against the danger, and when he assures himself of all needful grace from him, will inspire him with courage, will make his resistance firm, and finally successful. If he enjoys *prosperity* in outward affairs, the belief that *God's favour encompasses him as with a shield*, and that he will establish that prosperity, if it be for his real good, will effectually preserve him from all solicitous and carking care of futurity; and give him the highest relish and pleasure in the enjoyment. If his lot be an *afflicted* condition, faith and trust in God will do much to alleviate his burthen, and reconcile him to it; and

in the *last moments* of life, if the soul can say, *this God, is my God, and will be my portion for ever*; death will lose its terrors, and he will be able to leave the world with such an hope of glory, as shall be an honourable testimony to the truth and wisdom of a religious life; and as shall be succeeded *by fulness of joy, and pleasures that last for evermore.*

S E R M O N III.

The Nature and Reasonableness of religious Trust.

PSALM xxxvi. 7.

*How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God!
therefore the children of men put their trust
under the shadow of thy wings.*

I Have before spoken to you from these words, which give us occasion to consider the excellency of God's loving kindness, and the acknowledgment that we should make of it, by putting our trust under the shadow of his wings. I have largely represented the first to you, and shewn you, that loving kindness, or goodness, is an essential and immutable attribute of God's nature, never liable to the least diminution and change; that the objects of it are numerous as the works of creation, that even the inanimate parts of it, give evident proofs of this divine perfection, being formed as well for ornament as for use, and being continued throughout the successive ages and generations of the world. And the goodness of God is peculiarly manifested to the animal creation

tion, the *irrational* part of which live upon his bounty, and rejoice in the daily provision he affords them, whilst he exercises a *peculiar providence* over *man*, is *good* both to the *just* and the *unjust*, and is in an *especial manner*, concerned for the welfare and happiness of those that fear and serve him. But what are all the objects of the divine bounty in *our* world, compared with the infinitely greater number that dwell in *other parts* of the *creation*; and are the inhabitants of those numberless orbs and worlds, which every where surround us? How *vast* the *mind* that can comprehend them within its view, and how *rich* the *goodness* that continually upholds and supplies them! For the *effects* of the divine goodness, as well as the *objects* of it, proclaim the excellency of God's loving kindness. Of this, *creation* itself, and the giving being and capacities for happiness, to such an infinite variety of creatures, is an astonishing evidence. Nor are the works of *providence* a less demonstration of this truth, that *God is good*; but the peculiar *riches* of the *grace* and mercy of God are visible in the scheme and method of *redemption*. Every circumstance of which is a display of the divine compassion, and which gives the promise, and secures the inheritance of the most substantial and durable blessings. For the effects of God's loving kindness never fail, and *his mercy endures throughout all generations*.

And this consideration of the divine goodness, is an abundant encouragement to our
trusting

trusting in God, this is the inference made by the Psalmist in my text, *therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings*. This is the reason why all that know him, fly to his protection for safety, and reckon themselves secure from all evil, under the safe-guard of his almighty power and unvaried goodness. *Putting their trust under the shadow of God's wings*, is a figurative expression, frequent in the eastern languages, and taken from nature, from the tender care that birds take of their young, when they gather them under their wings, either to cherish and warm them, or to protect them from every harm and injury; a similitude often used in the sacred writings. Thus *Moses* tells the people*, *as an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, and bears them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him*. And our blessed Saviour, lamenting that destruction which he saw hang over *Jerusalem*, cries out †, *How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not!* And there is no resemblance that could be made us, that expresses in a more lively manner the tender care that God exercises towards good men, and the fulness of their confidence and security in the loving kindness of God. I shall endeavour here to shew,

* *Deut. xxxij. 11.*

† *Luke xxiii. 37.*

I. What is *implied* in this *putting our trust in God*.

II. That God's *loving kindness* is an *abundant foundation* for *putting our trust in him*.

L. I am to shew, what is *implied* in this *putting our trust in God*; what exercises and dispositions of the mind concur to form and constitute this useful grace.

1. The foundation of it is laid in the *firm belief* and *full persuasion*, that this *loving kindness of God* is *really as excellent* and *great*, as it is represented. That it is an essential, necessary perfection of God's nature, that it is absolutely *immutable*, and subject to no possible decay; that the exercise of it is perpetual and constant; that it is *universal* and extensive in its benefits and effects, to all objects capable of them; that it is *special* and *peculiar*, to all the *upright* and *faithful*; that the *gospel* discoveries of it are founded in *truth*, and that all these *promises by Christ*, that discover the exceeding greatness and riches of it, shall be abundantly made good. And, in a word, that it exceeds all human or created goodness, as far as *absolute* and *unchangeable* perfection is more excellent than what is *limited* and subject to perpetual *alterations*. Without this firm persuasion of the divine goodness, there can be no just reason for fixing our hearts by trust in God. If we question, whether this excellence belongs to the character of God, it will render all confidence in him absolutely impossible, and check every tendency of the mind to repose itself in, and take refuge under his

his protection. Because there is no consideration that can encourage such a disposition towards God, exclusive of benevolence and mercy. For if we imagine that there are any other attributes in God which render the exercise of his goodness precarious and uncertain, or that demand a separate and peculiar glory, and that must necessarily be illustrated and magnified at the expence, or by the diminution and concealment of the loving kindness of God; this will create suspicion and jealousy, produce fear and terror, and prevent that approach of the mind to and acquiescence in God, which is essentially implied in our trusting in him. Or if we look upon God as a *fickle* and *inconstant* being, governed in his regards to his creatures, by considerations different from the nature of *their character*, and the absolute *rectitude* of *his own*; as *arbitrary* and *partial* in the exercise of his love or anger, and in distributing the good or ill effects of the one or other; under such a persuasion, there can be no room for any settled and established confidence in God, nor any principles that can warrant and support a lively, cheerful trust in his power and goodness. All must be uncertainty, and the posture of the mind perpetually anxious and doubtful; where there are not right apprehensions of the loving kindness of God, nor any firm and habitual persuasion of his infinite, unparallelled, and immutable goodness. Farther,

2. Trust in God implies, in consequence of this belief, a *full resignation* and *submission* of

the heart and mind to God, and of all the circumstances and great events of our lives, to the divine direction and disposal. It is not a *vain* and *confident* persuasion, that God will gratify this *particular* desire, or grant me this or the other *fond inclination* or wish, or prosper or succeed me in such or such a pursuit that I have set my heart upon. There is nothing in reason or revelation to countenance such an expectation as this; and he must be ignorant both of God and himself, that harbours and indulges it. *Trust in God* is both a more *rational* and *humble* disposition. The foundation indeed that supports it, is the highest and most honourable conception of the divine benevolence and goodness, as an *internal* principle and perfection in the mind of God; but then it leaves that blessed being entirely *free* in the direction and exercise of it; doth not prescribe to him what the effect of it shall be, doth not limit and measure it by bodily propensions and passions, nor dictate to him the time and season, to manifest and illustrate it. No, trust in God is a disposition of rational piety. Instead of *presumptuous* expectations that God will humour our vanity, or gratify our pride, or satisfy imaginary wants, or grant us every thing that we think good for ourselves, or grant it exactly in that season in which we may wish it; the truly pious refer every thing of this nature to the divine will and pleasure, leaves it to his infinite wisdom and goodness, to chuse and order every thing as he sees it most convenient and proper, and
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from a full persuasion, that infinite goodness can never do amiss, waits the result of the divine appointment, and wholly submits all he wishes and desires to the sovereign disposals of the greatest and best of beings.

This is necessarily included in trusting in God, which implies a firm and habitual persuasion, that infinite goodness directs and disposes all events, that in the divine administration nothing can be contrary to and inconsistent with this character of goodness; and that therefore, whatever happens to us, in consequence of the divine permission and ordinances, whether suitable or contrary to our particular wishes and desires, whether we can see the particular reason or immediate intention of it, or not; yet is really an act of goodness, and intended for our benefit. Hence the Psalmist exhorting us to *trust in God*, adds, as what was essentially included in it †, *commit thy way unto the Lord*. And in another place; *cast thy burthen upon the Lord*. And St. Peter *, *cast all your care upon him; for he careth for you*; refer every thing to his providence, and never cherish the least suspicion as to the equity, wisdom, and kindness of his disposal. Rather let us,

3. Live in an *humble, cheerful expectation* of receiving seasonable appearances and manifestations of the divine favour and goodness, suitable to our circumstances and real wants. This is a farther degree of trust, and what

† Psalm xxxvii. 3—5.

* 1 Pet. v. 7.

properly fixes and determines the nature of this grace, and distinguishes it from all other religious dispositions. Although true piety dares not *prescribe* to God, yet it hath the *largest expectation* from his infinite goodness, and cherishes the *warmest hopes* of all *essential blessings*. Although it refers all the circumstances of life to the orderance and conduct of his providence, yet it is because it hath the fullest assurance, that *all the ways of God shall be mercy and truth*, and that God will give the desired blessing, if it be for our benefit to receive it, or withhold it only, because it is not for our advantage to obtain it. The *acknowledging God in all our ways*, is only reasonable upon this supposition, that *he will* some how or other, *direct our steps*; and the encouragement to *cast our burthen upon the Lord* is, because *he will sustain us*. And it would be absolutely in vain for us to commit our cares and desires to him, if we had no reason to form any expectations of receiving the needful good from him. And therefore *trusting in God* necessarily includes the lively, chearful *expectation* of all those kind *interpositions* in our behalf, on which our *true welfare* depends, and without which, the real essential happiness of our nature cannot be obtained. And the more *fixed* and *habitual* our *persuasions* are of the divine goodness, and the more *honourable* the *sentiments* we entertain of his benignity and grace, the *larger* our *expectations* will be from him; and our souls will be more fully established in the assurance, that he will withhold no needed blessing from

from us. Hence these assurances of the Psalmist *, *delight thyself in the Lord and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart. Commit thy way to the Lord, trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him.* And the Prophet Jeremiah †, *the Lord is good to them that wait for him, even to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait, for the salvation of the Lord.* It is both his duty and interest, it is reasonable in itself, and what the event will abundantly justify and reward. It may not be amiss here to point out several of those *important circumstances* of our being, in which this *expectation* of the divine goodness and mercy is *peculiarly becoming and proper.* Particularly,

1. In all our *lawful and prudent measures and endeavours*, for the *supports and comforts* of life. Good men especially, may reasonably expect God's providential blessing to *succeed* them, if not to give the *abundance*, and raise them to large degrees of affluence and wealth, yet so far as to *give them things convenient for them*; and in general to grant them what is proper for that condition and state of life in which his providence hath placed them. The very order of the world could not be maintained, nor the common and necessary affairs of it, carried on with regularity and success, if there was an *universal equality* of condition and circumstance in it. If riches and plenty were

* Psalm xxxvii. 45.

† Lament. iii. 25.

to be equally distributed, and the external favours of providence were dispensed exactly in an even proportion, without difference and distinction; were this the case, many important relations that now subsist, would be entirely dissolved, society itself must instantly disband, many essential duties of human life, would lose all obligation, and many of the most excellent virtues would find no opportunity and room for exercise. And therefore as the *expectation* of *affluence* and *plenty*, in *all ranks* of men, is unreasonable and groundless, and checked and forbidden, by their stations and employments in life; so there can be no possible room for their expecting that God will so prosper any endeavours they can make use of, as that all shall attain to that abundance of wealth of which some are in possession. But what is as good, they have many reasons both from natural and revealed religion to hope, that as the reward of prudence and diligence, and habitual integrity, in the circumstances in which they are placed; God will so direct and prosper them, as that they shall have every thing *necessary* to render their condition *comfortable*, and to enable them to discharge those duties which are connected with, and arise out of their condition. And I am persuaded, that where persons fail of such provisions, it is owing generally to *negligence* and *misconduct* in themselves, and not to any defect in the kindness and care of providence; which, besides the blessing it hath naturally connected with a right conduct, is

peculiarly interested in the happiness of good men, and takes a distinguishing pleasure in promoting it. This is evidently included in these general assertions †, *Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. And they that wait upon the Lord shalt inherit the earth.* And in that promise of our blessed Lord ‖, *Seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof in the first place, and all these things shall be added to you.* All these things, viz. our meat and drink and apparel, all things necessary to the comfortable support of life, and suitable to our respective stations and condition in it. Again,

2. In all cases of *importance* to our welfare and happiness, in circumstances of *difficulty*, on the right improvement of which, events of great consequence to our welfare depend, *good men* may humbly and chearfully *expect* from God, all that *prudence* and *wisdom* which are necessary to the right direction and success of their affairs. This is a hope that naturally arises out of the belief of the infinite goodness of God, exerting itself in the course of a constant providence, and extending its effects to all those various objects that are comprehended within the extent and reach of it. The sagacity and foresight of human reason can see, comparatively, but a little way before it, are far from being equal to all the emergencies arising in the course of any one single life, are frequently at a loss what course to

† Psal. xxxvii. 3—9.

‖ Matt. vi. 33.

steer; and after the most serious and deliberate counsels, often fix upon mistaken measures; which however promising and likely, fail of the desired success, and lead men into the most substantial and durable disappointments. And therefore there is nothing more becoming the imperfect state of man, than frequently to distrust themselves, and *not lean too much to their own understanding*; to ask advice and follow it, and more especially to ask counsel of the great *Father of lights* and the *giver of all true wisdom*. He hath the most perfect knowledge of all future events, and the constant direction of all those natural causes that produce them, and of every circumstance that can tend to delay and prevent them; and by innumerable methods to us unknown, he can secretly influence and guide our minds to those resolutions and methods, that shall, all things considered, be the properest for us, and finally secure to us our most valuable wishes and desires. Yet this could never be our duty or our interest, but upon the supposition that God would give wisdom, and guide us, either by secret suggestions to our minds, or by the plain leadings of his good providence, into the way that we ought to take, and to pursue the most prudential and effectual methods. And that those who trust in God have reason to hope for such a divine conduct, in the most interesting events of their being, is confirmed by many passages in divine revelation *, *Acknowledge him in all*

* Prov. iii. 6.

thy ways, and he shall direct thy paths. † What man is he that feareth the Lord, him shall he teach in the way that he shall chuse. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant. § Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness, he will guide his affairs with discretion. And by that direction of St. James †, If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, viz. fully assured that God will give it him; for let not that man who wavereth think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. Farther,

3. In all circumstances of threatening and peculiar danger, good men have reason to expect from God protection and safety, or at least if the evils they fear come on them, that they shall in the event be some way or other over-ruled, to promote their welfare and happiness. Goodness naturally inclines to prevent misery, and can take no delight in causing and beholding it; and therefore infinite goodness may be reasonably thought ever disposed to hinder those afflictions and miseries from befalling good men, that may either prove destructive to their persons, or that may prevent the true enjoyment and happiness of their lives. Unless there are reasons over-balancing the consideration of private good, that render the permission of such evils necessary and fit; or unless such evils are necessary to the particular advantage

† Psa. xxv. 12. § Psa. cxii. 4, 5. † James i. 5, 6, 7.

and *safety* of those whom they are permitted to befall. There is all the reason in the world to believe, that all *our times are in the hands of God*, and that the affairs of men are under his direction; and more especially that these great events upon which life, and the usefulness and enjoyment of it depend, are all under his controul, and wait his order and pleasure. This is the express doctrine of the *gospel* revelation, that *not a sparrow falls to the ground without our heavenly Father*, and that *the very hairs of our heads are numbered*. That is, the most inconsiderable circumstances of our being are all known to God, and there is nothing that can befall us without his leave and contrary to his permission, which he cannot over-rule, and which he doth not, as often as his people's welfare and the interest of his own moral government require it. And this must be as true as the *reality* and *efficacy* of *providence*, which is a mere insignificant, unmeaning sound, unless it implies the exercise of an active inspection and care, over all the affairs of the world, and particularly over the interest of truly *religious* and *virtuous* persons; who are in the nature of things, and the estimation of God, the *excellent ones of the earth*. And therefore if there be a special regard in the conduct of providence towards them, they may and ought to strengthen their hearts in this persuasion, that whatever be their lot, God will *preserve them* from destructive evil, and so *incompass them with his favour*, as with a *shield*, as that *no plague*, or fatal mischief shall

befal them. And that in times even of common calamity, God will, if it be best for them, preserve them from the general ruin, and because *he sets his heart on them, will deliver and save them.* Experience hath often proved the truth of this observation, and the *word of God* gives ground to cherish such an hope in him. Thus the Psalmist, in that short but excellent compofure *, *I will lift mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help; my help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. He that keepeth thee will not slumber, the Lord is thy keeper. The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand, the Lord shall preserve thee from all evil, he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore.* Or,

4. If any of the *afflictions* of life should in the course of providence befall the *truly upright*, they may certainly place their *trust* and *confidence in God*, that he will *support* them under them, *enable* them to *bear* them with becoming fortitude and patience, give them, in due time, a *seasonable release* or issue out of them, and so *over-rule, sanctify, and bless* them, as that they shall be the means of promoting their best interest and happiness. In this world, no one is exempt from evil, and he who expects to pass the journey of life, without a share of the common disadvantages attending it, shall, a thousand to one, find himself

mistaken in his reckoning, before he arrives at his journey's end. Such therefore who are of a truly religious disposition and character, must not imagine, that their fear and love of God will be their security from *all afflictive evil*, and shelter them from every trouble or distress of life. This would not be for their advantage, as in the *natural* world, the vicissitudes of day and night, sun-shine and rain, calms and tempests, winter and summer, have their use, and each in its return equally necessary with the other, to preserve the life and fertility and verdure of the vegetative world, and for other purposes; so with respect to men, there are *few* who can bear a *perpetual* summer of *prosperity*. It would frequently dry up all the sources and springs, all the radical moisture, that supplies and nourishes their graces, and enables them to bring forth the fruits of righteousness to due perfection, and in their proper season, and render them *barren and unfruitful, in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, and thus might finally prove the means of their forfeiting the salvation and blessedness of the gospel. And therefore, though we are naturally averse to affliction and evil, yet such as are exercised thereby, should not by any means look on them as unnecessary for themselves, or as permitted with an unfriendly intention on the part of God.

But That *infinite goodness* which presides over the world, and directs, Christian, all the particular affairs of thy life, cannot possibly *mean thee*

any ill, nor intend thy harm, though it suffers thee *to be in heaviness* through the trials that befall thee. The first thing therefore under affliction that we should endeavour after, is to establish ourselves in the persuasion, that the permission of it is not contrary to divine goodness, but rather the effect and proof of it. Possibly there is something wrong in me that wants to be corrected, some irregular indulgence that I need to be restrained from, or a growing remissness in religion that it is fit I should be roused out of. Or if I can say with Job, *not for any iniquity that is in my hands*; yet possibly God foresaw my danger from certain particular concurring circumstances, that might have drawn me into great inconveniencies, and, in the issue, have obstructed my happiness and salvation. And therefore, out of his tender regard for me, permitted this particular distress to befall me, to prevent a more substantial and durable evil from coming near me. Or he permitted it as a *trial* of my *sincerity*, of my *faith*, my *patience*, my *submission* to his will, my *hope* in his mercy, that I might have the comfort arising from the knowledge of my own integrity, might grow better prepared for final mercy, and might have a more reviving *experience* of his *grace*, in enabling me rightly to support under, and in carrying me through the affliction that distresses me. For this, Christian, is what thou mayest with the greatest certainty depend on, that under thy burthens God will not forsake thee, and that whatever be thy trial, it shall

shall not wholly and finally oppress thee. Thou hast a perpetual *refuge in God*, his *promises*, if thou attendest to them, will give thee daily satisfaction, the *exercises of devotion and piety*, will not fail to inspire thee with strength and patience. *The grace of God shall be sufficient for thee*, thy afflictions shall contribute to thy welfare, and help to work out for thee a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. God will be thy *present help*, in every time of trouble, and therefore whatever thy trials and distresses are, comfort thyself in, and take the benefit of that divine assurance and promise, *Fear thou not, for I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God†, I will strengthen thee, I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

May we all by a genuine piety and obedience, be interested in these promises, and experience the accomplishment of them in life and death; and after death enjoy all that happiness which can be expected from the excellent loving kindness of our heavenly Father to his beloved children! Amen.

† Isa. xli. 10.

S E R M O N IV.

A particular Providence explained and proved.

PSALM xxiii. 6.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

THERE is no real security for the happiness of human life, nor any foundation that can support the hope of it; but the certainty of the being, perfections, and providence of God. Every other scheme leaves us in a state of the most absolute doubt and fear, and affords nothing to sustain us under those perpetual changes, to which all earthly affairs are necessarily and perpetually subject. Take away the *moral agency* and *government of God*, and we are absolutely left to the *caprice of chance*; or to the *unalterable laws of necessity and fate*; or rather, since chance and fate are mere names, without sense and meaning, unless the properties of some intelligent, active being, we are left partly to the mechanism of mere *undefining matter*

matter and motion, partly to the conduct of our *own power and wisdom*, which fail us in a thousand instances, and partly to the *lusts, passions, and vices of other men*, without any thing to over-rule and controul them; to neither of which, a thoughtful, wise, and good man would ever wish to see himself, and all the best interests of his being, entirely exposed and abandoned.

The larger share any person enjoys of human prosperity, he must naturally wish more warmly for the continuance of it; and if he were subject to a continual anxiety and fear of being dispossessed of it, would really be incapable of any satisfactory enjoyment of what he had. It is the *hope* of the continuance of the blessings he possesses, that renders them sources of pleasure, and gives them their chief power to entertain and gratify him.

The Psalmist was in possession of every thing he needed. *He lay down in green pastures*, enjoyed an abundance of the good things of life; alluding to the rich and verdant pastures into which careful shepherds drive their flocks for their plentiful subsistence. *He dwelt besides the still waters*, enjoyed his plenty without disturbance, with an easy, tranquil mind, of which condition, the still and gentle waters are the natural emblem. *His table was spread in the midst of his enemies: His head was anointed with oil, and his cup ran over with wine.* Expressions, denoting his great abundance, and the security and peace, with which he enjoyed it: And what crowned
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all was, he promised himself the continuance of his happy lot, and that his prosperity should be lasting and undisturbed. He knew as well as any man the natural instability of all earthly prosperity, and that there was no mountain so strong, but it was capable of being moved. He had been himself witness to great changes in the circumstances of other men, and had seen all their prosperity wither and die away from the possessors, and was fully apprized, that there was nothing in the nature of his own happiness that rendered it more stable and permanent than that of others; and yet ventures to assure to himself a lasting felicity, and which in a good measure should continue stedfast and immoveable to the end of life; an *assurance*, which he derived from the *perpetual providence* and *protection* of God, and the continuance of his favour and friendship towards him. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.* In which words we have,

I. The *comfortable conclusion* which the Psalmist draws in his own favour.—*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*

II. The *resolution* he forms in consequence of it.—*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

I. We have the *comfortable conclusion* which the Psalmist draws in his own favour.—*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*, i. e. the goodness and mercy

mercy of God. He was fully convinced of the *providence* of God, of the *universality* and *constancy* of it, of its extending to every individual, of its *peculiar concern* for his welfare and happiness; that the great intention of it was the good of mankind, and particularly of the *religious* and *virtuous* part of them; and therefore as one conscious to himself, of his high veneration and regard for God, he promises himself the benefit of the divine protection, that God would ever be good and merciful to him, and cause him to share all the effects and happy fruits of his grace and favour, even to the end of life. This persuasion he founded on God's *relation* to him §. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* And on the past *experience* he had received of God's peculiar favour to him ||. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.* And especially on the recollection of what God hath done for him in a *moral* and *religious* view †. *He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake.* And this reasoning is well founded; because the *goodness* of God is an *eternal* and *immutable* principle of his nature, good men have just cause to expect the continuance of the divine mercy to them, in every future circumstance of life, from the experience of God's mercy in the former part of it; because the disposition to acts of kindness is unchangeably the same, the same it was from everlasting, and

§ Ver. 1. || Ver. 2. † Ver. 3.

will

will remain so for ever without the least variableness or shadow of turning: But then,

II. We have the Psalmist's *resolution* in consequence of this conclusion he thus draws in his own favour. *And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.* The *house of the Lord*, in the time of *David*, was the *tabernacle* only, and the place where it resided; the *temple* not being erected till the reign of his son and successor, king *Solomon*. Now the *tabernacle* was the place where all the solemn sacrifices were to be offered, to which good men resorted to offer up their thanksgivings and supplications, and where *God appeared*, by a *visible majesty and glory*, to testify oftentimes the acceptance of the services of his worshippers. To this the royal Psalmist alludes, when banished in the wilderness, he expresses his impatience to be restored to the liberty of worshipping God in the *tabernacle**, *to see*, as he expresses himself, *thy power and thy glory, as I have seen thee in thy sanctuary*, referring to the cloud and glory, which were the emblems both of the majesty and gracious acceptance of God: And therefore when the Psalmist declares that he would *dwell in the house of the Lord for ever*, the meaning is, that he would pay his most *solemn and public* acknowledgements to God; that the constant experience of the divine goodness should awaken in him an *habitual gratitude*, and that his returns of

* Psal. lxi. 2.

adoration and praise should be as *daily* and *constant* as the benefits he received from him. As he promised himself the continuance of the divine goodness and mercy all the days of his life; so he resolves that he would employ himself in the worship of God his benefactor *for ever*, rightly concluding, that renewed favours renew and strengthen men's obligations to gratitude and praise, and that the reasons for thankfulness and duty can never cease, whilst God continues to be kind and gracious. The words being thus explained will give us occasion to consider the following subjects.

I. The *nature* and *certainty* of a *particular providence*.

II. That there is *no security* of *human happiness* but in the *favour* of *God*.

III. That the *proper expression* of *gratitude* to God for his benefits, is *solemnly to worship* and *praise him*.

I. These words lead us to consider the *nature* and *certainty* of a *particular providence*; for the Psalmist's conclusion in his own favour, that *goodness and mercy shall follow him all his days*, is entirely founded on this principle; that God had an *especial concern* for his welfare and happiness, and would by all *suitable* and *proper methods* continue to promote it: A principle, that supposes God's providence extends to *individuals*, and that he hath the *peculiar* and *special direction* and orderance of the great events and circumstances of human life,

life, and particularly those of *good* and *up-right* men.

20 The *general providence* of God is that *general care* which he takes of the *whole frame* of *nature*, to *preserve* it in order; or that divine superintendency and influence, by which he *continues* in being and vigour all those *original laws of nature* by which the structure of the universe in general, and the particular being of each individual are upheld and continued throughout the several successive ages of their existence. These laws are by *some* supposed to have been *wisely* and *immutably* fixed from the beginning of things; and therefore so fixed as to admit of no kind of change or variation from them, so that the world, and every individual in it, are upon this scheme supposed to be wholly exempted from all further divine care and inspection; other than what relates to the keeping up in force the primary laws impressed on them at their first creation, and *all* agents to be absolutely *left to shift for themselves* in the best manner they can, under a settlement rendered necessary, fatal and unalterable by the first contriver of it, and from intermeddling in which, from over-ruling, new-directing, or suspending which, he hath *excluded even himself*, so as never to interfere on any occasions, or for the sake of any ends or persons whatsoever. Consider here :

1. That there are such *original laws* of *nature* impressed on the whole frame, and which
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do more or less extend to every individual, is what no person will deny, who hath any knowledge of the structure of things, or the regular process of nature in her operations and productions; And that the *great ends* of the divine providence and government are *generally* carried on by those laws, as far as their influence can extend; so that God doth not *rashly* or *capriciously* vary from them, will also be universally allowed. But that God hath absolutely determined *never* to supersede them, that he never hath suspended them, or that there can never be any reason in the course of his providence to give them a new direction: These are things *incapable* of *all proof*, and should therefore never be asserted. Upon the supposition that *miracles* have been performed, and there are facts of this nature, the proofs of the truth of which will not easily be evaded: It is certain, that God hath *not* tied up himself by the instrumentality of these second causes, nor so fixed the laws of nature, as to resolve never to depart from and act without them. But

2. If *every thing* in nature was absolutely *material*, and wholly subject in all its powers and operations to the original laws of matter and motion, I am apt to think, this *general* providence of God would account for *all* appearances and events whatsoever: For then the rules, by which all kinds of beings would proceed, would be similar and uniform; and there would be *no reason* for any deviations from them. The same impressions of divine

power would constantly produce the same effects, and the ends of providence be all answered by one uniform, regular and invariable train of causes and effects. Every thing in this view would be subject to real necessity, and be as peremptory and fixed, as the gravitation of matter; or the laws to which the vegetable or animal part of the creation are subject.

3. This allowance of a *general* providence is in some respects *acknowledging a special and particular* one. For by granting that the laws of the material world are upheld by the *continual influence and impresson* of the divine power, it is acknowledged, that the most inconsiderable and contemptible insect is the *continual care*, and under the perpetual guardianship and protection of God. His almighty power is *always* exerted for its preservation. It is *God* who *continues* the several *species*, and *upholds every individual* in being; who preserves their respective powers and instincts, and keeps them constantly in their right direction to such objects and actions, as is necessary to their welfare, and to distinguish them from all other sorts of being whatsoever. Yea, there is not a *spire of grass*, upon this scheme of a general providence, but what vegetates and grows by a divine immediate agency: There is not a *flower* of the field or garden, but what the *hand of God paints*; not a single *blossom*, but what *he opens*; not one production amidst all the infinite variety of nature but what he cherishes,

rishes, cultivates, and brings at length to its full maturity and perfection.

Hard fate of man, if he is the *only* creature in the universe, who is left *destitute* of his Maker's care, and given up to chance or fate, or wholly abandoned to himself, amidst a thousand uncertainties and accidents and evils of life, without any share in the regards, or interest in the conduct of that divine power and wisdom, which continually exert themselves in favour of every other individual being whatsoever! To each of these there is in reality a particular providence exerted: And this is necessarily implied in the acknowledgment of God's general providence: For a general providence is in truth nothing else but such a providence as extends itself to every individual. And those *general* laws of nature, by which the constant course of natural causes and effects is upheld, are *applied* and *directed* in their influence, efficacy and operation in exact proportion, as the distinct species of the several beings that exist, and the distinguishing powers and properties of them respectively require.

There is in *some* respects a *particular* providence exerted with respect to *every man* upon this scheme of a general providence: For the *animal* part of his frame is subject to the *general laws* of matter and motion: And he *lives* and *grows* by the constant agency of God, keeping those laws in their perpetual vigour and activity: And that even those laws do *not* operate always exactly uniform and alike;

but have sometimes a different direction, and do produce very different effects, is evident from the *dissimilitude* in form, features, countenance, height, and other properties of individuals. A fact that could not happen if *natural* causes *always* operated exactly in the *same* manner, and which therefore must be owing, either to the *self-direction* of those natural causes themselves, which is absurd, or to the *will* and *pleasure of him* who hath appointed all the laws of nature, and diversifies their operations and effects, according to the direction of his own wisdom and goodness.

It remains therefore, upon the allowance of a *general* providence, that *every* individual person is in many respects, an object of the *perpetual* inspection and care of God; or that there is a *particular* providence exercised towards him, both in the *formation* and *production* of his particular frame, and in the *constant preservation* and *support* of it; and that it doth not appear, that these effects are, or in their nature can be, owing to the perpetually uniform operation of natural causes, but to the *voluntary* determination and direction of him, by whose perpetual influence those laws continue in force, and produce such effects, as he ordains and directs them to produce.

This is necessarily included in the character of God's being the *constant preserver* of all things: A character which will be allowed him by all who believe his being and perfections, and which can never be denied him but upon the supposition either of the
eternity

eternity and independency of matter and all its laws, or the subjection of all things to absolute necessity and fatality. Suppositions which, however different they may seem, will be found upon strict reasoning to coincide; and can indeed only be true upon the scheme of strict *infidelity* and downright *Atheism*. But,

4. Besides this character of God, as the *preserver of all things*, there is another equally essential to him, which is that of *Governor*; and besides his *natural* providence, by which he sustains the whole frame, and every individual, there is a *moral administration* which he exercises towards moral and intelligent agents: And if there be any of his creatures, *capable* of such government, it is as absurd to imagine, that God will divest himself of his charge, as that he will throw up the protection of the natural world, which cannot subsist without his constant influence and support. That *men* are capable subjects of *moral* government is as certain, as that they can *think* and are conscious, and can *recollect* and have *free choice*; can give a *reason* of their conduct, can govern themselves by a *rule*, can be influenced by *sanctions*, and reap the *effects* of their own *temper and behaviour*.

And this *capacity* for moral government demonstrates the *original intention* of their being, that God designed them for a state of *rational subjection* and obedience to himself, made them naturally *accountable* to his own tribunal, and expects that they govern them-

selves by those laws which he hath appointed them. What is *essential* to, and involved universally in the nature of any species of beings, demonstrates the great *end* of their formation: And it is not more certain that God gave men reason, that they should use and exercise it, than it is, that he made them in a state of subjection to himself, that he might govern them, and gave them the powers of choice, freedom, consciousness and recollection to render them accountable.

If then *every* man as such is the unquestionable subject of God's moral government, every individual is for this reason under the special constant inspection and conduct of God: i. e. *God exercises a particular providence over him*, without which there can be no *moral government*. God is concerned, as becomes a wise and good governor, for his happiness, and promotes it, as far as is consistent with his own wisdom and rectitude; either by *general* laws and constitutions, or by such *peculiar interpositions*, as the general welfare, or the happiness of individuals may render *necessary* and *expedient*. When the permitting the general laws of nature to take place will answer the views of the divine administration, no doubt but they are permitted to go on: But when there are special ends to be answered, for which these laws are *not sufficient*, or when the general views of the divine administration cannot be accomplished by the regular, uninterrupted course of these laws, it is every way reasonable

sonable to think, that *God* will exert his own power and wisdom to bring them about in such a manner as shall finally prove effectual, without tying himself up to any ordinary methods of action, or confining himself to the usual and stated laws of nature. Since it is equally easy to *God* to act by or vary from those original laws, and absolutely certain that whether he maintains that *first* direction, or at any time impresses on any part of the frame of things a *new* one, he doth the one or the other to render them subservient to his own purposes, and especially the interest of his *moral* kingdom and government.

As *God* superintends the affairs of *nations* and *kingdoms*, where is the difficulty of supposing, that as he *frequently continues* the course of *natural* laws to produce fruitful seasons, and every other circumstance, on which national prosperity depends, as an *encouragement* to national integrity and virtue; so he doth on *proper* occasions *check* the force and operation of natural causes, withhold, or so alter the influence of his own power and activity, as shall produce the contrary effects for the *punishment* of national immorality and vice: And as *every* individual is under the divine inspection, is the subject of *God's* government, and accountable at his tribunal; as *religion* and *virtue* secure his *approbation*, and *impiety* and *vice* are his necessary *abhorrence*, what more consistent with the character of *God*, as an infinitely wise, righteous,

good and merciful being; than that he should so direct and order the methods of his providence towards every individual, as shall most effectually *discountenance* what he *abhors*, and *encourage* and *promote* that *moral rectitude*, which is the great end of his government, and agreeable to his nature and will.

5. This *doctrine of a particular providence* is the *substance* of all *divine revelation*, which in general contains the account of God's dealings with particular nations and persons, and teaches that God's inspection and care extends to every object without exception: A doctrine, *confirmed by our blessed Lord* in the most express manner, and on the truth of which, all the great motives to religion and virtue, I had almost said, the very being of both, and their continuance in the world, depend. And though *bad* men will never relish this doctrine, and will be apt to charge God, thus exercising an universal providence over every particular person, in the language of *Cecilius*, an ancient objector to Christianity on account of this very principle, with being "troublesomely and impertinently inquisitive" and curious:" Yet to *good* men the belief of his particular providence is the *great satisfaction* and *comfort* of their being, as it gives an high relish to every single enjoyment they have, and is a full security to their minds, that they shall obtain from the guardianship and care of it that *constant protection*, which is necessary to their preservation, that *daily guidance*,

guidance, which shall keep them from all fatal mistakes in conduct, and that *liberal supply* of all their returning wants, which is essential to their security and happiness.

6. The things that may be *expected* from this *peculiar* providence of God, are such as are *worthy the interposition* of the *divine goodness*, and *essential* to the true *welfare* and *happiness* of mankind. They relate both to *soul* and *body*, and to our most valuable concerns in *time* and to *eternity*. Though the particular providence of God cannot be denied without giving up his moral providence and government, yet we should take care not to extend it to things impertinent and mean, unsuitable to the dignity and perfection of his character, or that can in the least reflect upon his moral rectitude and purity. Some persons have rendered the doctrine of a particular providence contemptible and ridiculous, by introducing it, and talking of it, as concerned in all the minute and uninteresting events of life, which are of no consequence in themselves, and in which nothing but *weakness* and *enthusiasm* could imagine any *special* interposition of the divine agency and providence. They ascribe the common and ordinary actions of every day, the visits they make, the resolutions they form, the dictates of their own folly, the suggestions of their own caprice and humour; their unconnected, undigested effusions, and other things of a like trivial nature, to God's particular direction and impression; as though they had this great and glorious being
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at their beck, or were themselves only a sort of machines, perpetually moved and actuated by his direction and impulse: But those who would speak with understanding, propriety and decency, of the particular providence of God, should promise themselves no immediate interpositions or influences of the deity, but such as are *worthy* the infinite wisdom, rectitude and goodness of his nature, and *essential* to the *moral improvement* and *real happiness* of rational agents, on their trial for eternity.

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S E R M O N V.

A particular Providence the only Foundation of a good Man's Security.

P S A L M xxiii. 6.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

THESE words plainly assert the *reality* of a *particular providence*, or such a providence as extends its care and goodness to *particular persons* : For the Psalmist's assurance *that goodness and mercy shall follow him all his days* could be supported upon no other foundation but this, that God hath a regard to *all* the works of his hands, and that in particular the concerns of *every man's* being and life are under his *immediate* and *peculiar direction*. I have shewn you that all the *laws of nature*, by which all the various effects of the material world are produced, are the *laws of God*, and owe their *power and efficacy* to the *perpetual impressions and influence* of God, and that there is therefore a *special providence* exercised

exercised to every individual in the *production* and *continuance* of his frame, and that as the character of God, as the *moral governor* of the world, is as *real* and *important*, as that of his being the *creator* and *preserver* of it; he must therefore necessarily *inspect* the temper and behaviour of every individual *rational being* which he hath made, and so *direct* his own conduct and the disposals of his providence towards each of them, as may most effectually tend to *promote the ends of that government* which he exercises, and the *particular welfare* of those who are the *proper* subjects of it.

And unless this doctrine of a particular providence be allowed, all the *grand articles* and *duties* of religion will have *no* foundation; the *sense* of men's dependence on God will absolutely wear off; *prayer* for the divine protection and blessing be impertinence and superstition; *gratitude* and *thanksgiving* will be irrational and absurd; *hope* and *trust* in his power and goodness will be vain and fruitless; some of the *best dispositions* that we can exercise, will have *no encouragement* or motive; some of the *best pleasures* we receive will be absolutely *lost*, and the security of our minds, as to future happiness and safety, must be exchanged for a condition of *perpetual uncertainty*, *anxiety* and *fear*. As to those, who have had the *firmest belief* and *biggest sense* of deity, who have been persons of unquestionable religion and piety, and have lived and died by the principles and rules of it; they have *universally acknowledged* this
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particular providence of God: It hath been an avowed, indisputable principle with them; and they have not only asserted it, but have given us their *own experience* of it, and declared, many of them, the happy fruits and effects of it with respect to themselves. And I am apt to think, that whatever objections may be made against the truth of this doctrine, there will be enough in the *experience* of every *thoughtful* and *judicious* observer to establish and confirm him in the belief of it: And as it is a principle, thus *reasonable* in itself, and agreeable to what every one may find in *fact*; so there is none that gives *greater satisfaction* in the belief of it to all well-disposed minds, or that tends more to the establishment of their true comfort and happiness. This leads me

II. To the second thing I proposed to speak to from these words, which is, that there is really no promising ourselves any *security and continuance of happiness*, but from the *continued providence, favour and goodness of God*. No one reckons himself thoroughly happy, only upon account of what he now hath in actual *possession*; unless he can take in *futurity* into his hope, and enjoy the pleasing prospect that his present prosperity shall be established. It would have yielded but little consolation to the royal Psalmist, that he was now in plenty, if he had the melancholy prospect and distressing fear of future want, that he had *a table prepared for him in the midst of his enemies*, if he had reason to conclude, that he should be soon
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permitted to fall a prey to their cruelty and malice, or that *his soul was restored*, if he had not something to assure him, that he should be *preserved* from final forfeiture of divine favour, or that he *walked in the path of righteousness*, if he saw himself exposed to *dangerous and successful temptations*, that he had not resolution and firmness of mind sufficient to enable him to conquer. No, such an apprehension would have made him almost insensible to the felicity of his present condition, and filled him with the utmost anxiety, to think of the future sad alteration and exchange of it. And therefore what crowned his happiness, was the pleasing prospect of the continuance of it, and that it should be durable and permanent as life itself; not from any train of natural causes and effects, of which he saw the uncertainty, but from the *continued favour and protection* of him to whom he owed his happy state, whose power and goodness were abundantly sufficient to maintain his lot, and to prevent every substantial misery from befalling him. *Surely the goodness and mercy of God, my preserver and benefactor, shall follow me all my days.* Here I place my hope: From hence arises all my prospects of full establishment and security. And that the *favour and goodness* of *divine providence* is the only *foundation* of such a *confidence*, may be made appear from many considerations.

1. If the being of God be allowed; yet if *all interposition* of a particular providence be *denied*, and all events are supposed to be wholly

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left to the train of natural causes and effects; it ought to be considered, that what may be the effects of the ordinary operation of natural causes, is, as to us, an *absolute uncertainty*. We cannot possibly understand any thing of them any otherwise than as they come to pass, and the event discovers them; so that these are no manner of ground of a rational dependence and security, that our prosperity, temporal or spiritual, shall be lasting. If we may judge by experience and the course of things, these frequently deceive men's expectation: And that ancient observation of a very wise man *, *that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill*; or that events do not always answer to the probability of second causes, is frequently verified in every age of the world. Both in publick and private life the *best concerted measures* have often failed, and the wisest schemes have been entirely frustrated through some unexpected event, which hath come in the way and prevented their accomplishment; happening perhaps in the regular course of things, and which, because it could not be foreseen, could not be particularly provided and guarded against. Yea it hath often happened, that the very methods which have been resolved on, to render personal and publick happiness lasting, have proved by a sad reverse the *very means of destroying it*, and bring-

* Eccles. ix. 11.

ing on the most substantial and lasting misery ; so that the building our hope of security on any supposed train of natural causes and effects, is building on mere supposition, imagination and ignorance ; making conclusions from premises we know nothing about, and drawing inferences in our own favour from causes, as to the operations and productions, of which we are entire strangers ; and which instead of acting for our advantage may operate to our ruin. Men therefore must look *higher than second causes* to support their hope of continued good, even to him who is the supreme disposer of them, who can frustrate our expectations from the best appearances, and make even the most unpromising ones contribute to our welfare and felicity. But,

2. If we will take away the being of God, and suppose that there is no kind of providence, general or particular, exercised towards any part of the works of nature, and particularly no providential care towards men, and substitute *chance* or *fate* in the room of God and his providence ; what *security* can any man of common sense or reason derive from such a scheme as this ? Or rather in what a state of *absolute uncertainty* is he left upon this foundation ? If *chance* be any thing besides a *mere name* without meaning, reality and existence ; if it be as one of its defenders defines it, *a cause which produces any effect without intending or being conscious to it* ; the consequence to human happiness is the most *uncomfortable* that possibly can be, and cuts up the
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the foundation of all rational hope of permanent and lasting good from it. For if it be a cause which operates without consciousness or intention, it can have nothing but mere caprice and accident to direct it, and its *effects* must be eternally *variable* and *contradictory*; so that if under this direction our lot should be now ever so comfortable and happy, under the influence of the same unequal and variable principle, I may be soon reduced to the contrary extreme of misery, and cannot possibly ascertain the possession of my happiness for a single day or hour. The very term of chance implies perpetual uncertainty and mutability, which can never afford any just ground to expect constant and immutable felicity: But the *steady course* of natural events, and the *wise laws of nature*, by which all human effects are produced, are the most effectual *confutation* of the universal superintendency of chance, and fully deliver us from the terror of being subject to the capricious direction of it.

If we substitute *fate* and *necessity* in the room of chance; and of God and his providence, what effect will this have upon human happiness? And what hope will it afford us of a stable and permanent felicity? It will leave us in a state of as *absolute uncertainty*, as the scheme of chance itself: For till we know what we are fated to, we have every thing to fear from this doctrine of fatality. It may be our lot to be destined to the most substantial and permanent misery: And to have a full taste of

happiness only to give us a more exquisite sense of the distress attending the reverse of such a condition; so that upon this foot no one can argue from his present to his future happiness, nor derive any assurance to his mind of the continuance of one single ingredient of pleasure that he enjoys.

3. *The state of all things* in the present world is subject to *perpetual uncertainty and inconstancy*; there is no firm dependence to be placed on them, and there is no surer way to all the distresses and vexations of a disappointment, than to form large expectations from them, and to promise ourselves a sure continuance of any condition and measure of happiness they may flatter us with. *Prosperity* is a very *deceitful* thing, and often forsakes men when they have the most pleasing prospects of its duration. The best projected schemes for wealth frequently fail men: The advantages of trade and commerce are as precarious as the winds and waves, liable to perils by sea, to dangers at home, to be destroyed by flames, to be prevented by the vices of others, and to be lessened by the mismanagement and imprudences of those who conduct them. The very methods made use of to increase our riches too frequently prove the occasions of diminishing the substance we have, and reduce us to the extreamest necessity and want; so that men have no security from the constitution of things here below for the continuance of what they actually possess. We

have seen titles of honour forfeited; large acquisitions wasted away; families running to decay, and suddenly extinguished; and all the fairest prospects of earthly prosperity vanishing like a dream, and leaving those who formed and counted them sure and real, under the most affecting vexations and disappointments. Or if no change should happen in any of these circumstances, other accidents may arise to blast our favourite hope, and render us incapable of that satisfaction we thought ourselves sure of, from our external advantages. The use of *reason* itself may be *lost*: A perpetual scene of *bodily disorder* may render us *incapable of relishing* and enjoying them, and introduce distresses, which all these advantages may have no power to alleviate and remove: Or when we think ourselves in possession of all our hopes, and are apt in the fulness of our satisfaction to say to ourselves, *eat, drink, and be merry; death* may instantly claim us for his prey, and remove us where these things shall have no farther name or remembrance. This uncertainty of all things here below is the constant experience of all ages, and is set forth in the sacred writings by a variety of strong and affecting descriptions. Yea, what is the most valuable possession of human nature, *religion* and *virtue* themselves are, as far as they depend on *human resolution*, liable to *decay* and *change*, and too often prove as *the morning cloud* and *the early dew, which soon pass away*. To whatever objects we look,

inconstancy appears interwoven into their nature, and they all caution us to moderate our affections to them and expectations from them. I add,

4. *Man* is naturally an *imperfect, indigent, dependent* creature, with extremely limited powers and abilities evidently insufficient for his own happiness, and without any capacity to secure or direct the events of futurity, and render his own felicity durable and certain. His *natural* and *moral* endowments are *comparatively inconsiderable*, and how much soever he may boast himself of one or other of them, they will fail him in many cases of the utmost importance to him, and discover how defective and weak they are, and how little they deserve to be depended on. How *frail* a possession is *bodily strength*! and in how many cases is it absolutely impotent and useless? By how many creatures are we exceeded in it, and how easily is it *lost* by a sudden blow or a more gradual decay? How little is human *foresight* and *wisdom* to be trusted to, which cannot see through the accidents of a single day, nor provide against or discover the events of *to-morrow*? How *indigent* and *necessitous* is his condition throughout the whole of life? And how illy furnished for the supply and happiness of his own nature? Who is continually forced to look out of himself for the support of his frame, and to have recourse to innumerable external objects, to minister to him the very necessities of his being,

ing, whose comfort and welfare depend upon such a variety of things, which he hath it not in his power to command, and whose *wants*, though perpetually supplied, are *perpetually returning*, and as necessary to us as our very constitution and being. How vain therefore and impotent is all self-dependence? If left to our own power, how defenceless and open to every kind of danger? Or to our own best prudence, into what fatal mistakes and errors shall we not hurry ourselves? Or to the sufficiency and perfection of our nature, how great and numerous shall we experience our own wants to be? Every thing in our make discovers the defect and dependency of it, and shews that however it came into being, it was never formed to be self-supplied, and to extract its own happiness out of itself, without any relation or being beholden to another. And as *every* man is in his nature imperfect, and all need sovereign assistance and support, constancy of happiness is no more to be expected from *others* than from *ourselves*; for besides their being incapable of always supplying all our wants, there may and will be frequently a *want of inclination*, and we shall not always find the disposition to do it answerable even to the power and ability.

Since then the scheme of *atheism* will afford us *no rest* and *security* of mind, no allow us to promise ourselves any substantial and lasting felicity; no, nor the acknowledgment of a God, *without* introducing his *providence*

and *moral government*: Since the constitution of *all* things in the present world is *precarious*, and liable to a thousand accidents and changes: Since every man knows that his happiness is *not* absolutely *in himself*, but that he must be beholden to external objects, accidents and seasons, which he cannot over-rule and command; *where shall we rest ourselves?* What security can we obtain against the uncertainties of life? Or must we renounce our future prospects of happiness, and live under the anxiety of perpetual fears of unavoidable misery hereafter, to overwhelm us? *No, surley*: There is *one door of hope still open*, and a *solid foundation* of confidence and trust yet remaining, which if we rightly build on, will never disappoint us: And that is the *protection, favour and blessing* of the good *providence of God*. Surely *goodness and mercy shall follow us all our days*. Whatever are the methods of God's providence towards us, they shall all of them be subservient to our real good. Not that we can promise ourselves from hence, that there shall be *no interruption* of our temporal prosperity, nor any *affliction* of life befall us, but either that the very *afflictions* of life themselves shall be *over-ruled* for our advantage, and demonstrate God's goodness to us and care of us; or, that the *blessings and comfort* of life we have, shall be *stable and permanent*: This may be made to appear by many considerations. For,

1. The *providence of God* is a *principle* of religion, *certain and unquestionable*, and arises from

from the *necessary* perfections of the divine nature, and from the *relation* in which he stands towards all his creatures. And because the very ends of creation could not be carried on and answered, without the exercise of a moral providence and government; such a providence there must be, unless God be *incapable* of exercising it. But this can never be allowed, if God be the universal creator; because the *same* perfections by which he introduced the world into being, are abundantly *sufficient* for the protection and government of it. Or, unless God should be supposed voluntarily to divest himself of the charge of providence: But this would reflect on his wisdom and goodness. Nor can there be conceived any motive sufficient to induce the supreme Lord and universal proprietor of the world to renounce the universal kingdom, and entirely to sequester himself from his own creation. The *Epicurean dream* that providence is a *troublesome* and *fatiguing* providence, deserves not a refutation; since to *infinite* wisdom and power *nothing* can be *difficult*, nor the government of the world give a moment's uneasiness, labour or pain. And indeed providence is so interwoven with the notion of a God, as that it is impossible to separate them, without first entertaining dishonourable conceptions of God, and degrading the character of that infinitely blessed and glorious being. And if there be a providence, it must be *particular* and extend to *every individual* being; since a

general providence, which doth *not* comprehend *particulars*, is a contradiction in terms: And if providence be thus particular, it must be suited to the particular nature, character, wants and circumstances of every being, and so directed, as to promote the best and wisest purposes.

2. As providence is thus certain, so that *infinitely wise* and *powerful being* who directs the administration of it, is absolutely *sufficient* to effect all such purposes, and to over-rule all such events as have any connection with and tendency to promote the real happiness of all intelligent and reasonable beings. Dependence on natural causes, operating blindly and necessarily, is absurd. To form expectations from unmeaning, unconscious fatality and chance, is the height of weakness and folly. Here trust is like building without a foundation, and staying ourselves upon a delusion and a dream. It must be an intelligent, living, active being, who alone can deserve our confidence and hope. Infinite power shews a possibility of a thousand things being done to promote my happiness, of every difficulty and obstruction being removed out of the way of it, and of innumerable circumstances being made to contribute their share towards the promoting, perfecting and establishing it; especially when under the conduct of infinite wisdom. These divine perfections, concurring to operate in our favour, should remove all disquietude and
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anxiousness about futurity; and fix our hearts in the firm persuasion, that our happiness, if consulted and resolved on by these, shall be both satisfying and permanent. Especially considering,

3. That *providence* is in its nature, character and intentions, *kind, benevolent and friendly*, exercised principally for purposes of real goodness, and carried on to secure and gradually to bring about the most *valuable and excellent* effects. The preservation of the order of nature, the maintaining the powers of it, the over-ruling all events for the general benefit, and the providing for the subsistence, comfort, and happiness of individuals, are the grand and principal scheme and view of providence: And therefore in the *general* view of it, we may assure ourselves that the end aimed at by it, is the general good, and that this shall be sooner or later accomplished. And with respect to that providence which is exercised towards *particular* persons, especially towards such as are *truly religious and virtuous*, the aspect of it is ever favourable, and its invariable tendency is by all events and by the most effectual means, to prevent every real occasion of misery, and to supply every source of comfort and happiness. And those characters of divine providence, as infinitely gracious, kind and good, are abundantly sufficient to justify the largest expectations from it.

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This was the ground of the Psalmist's hope: *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all my days.* He had found that the conduct of providence towards him thus far had been exceeding friendly, and that his honour and interest and happiness had been invariably consulted by it. And therefore he rightly infers, that as *benevolence* was an *invariable* property of divine providence, and the great intention of it was to do good, he should experience the same care and kindness to the very end of his life, which had so liberally supplied and so constantly followed him thus far. And this conclusion was the more strong and reasonable, because God had not only highly favoured him with many distinguishing blessings, relative to the prosperity of his outward state, but had also given him the *disposition* that fitted him for perpetual mercy and goodness, and removed every thing that might obstruct the vouchsafement of any needed favours yet to come. *He restoreth my soul*, either by pardoning my past sins, or by recovering me from my errors. *He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake*, kindly and powerfully guides me into the practice of virtue and religion, that I might shew forth his praise, and magnify and adore his goodness. And this is the *great instance* of the goodness of the special and particular providence of God, which it should be our great desire and earnest prayer, every one of us, to experience, the *restoration of our souls* to peace, by

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pardoning mercy, and the *conduct* of his power and grace to lead us into the love and practice of *universal virtue and goodness*.

And hath God manifested his peculiar benevolence and affection towards me? Hath he forgiven the past errors of my life? Hath he recovered me from the path of vice? Formed me into the love of righteousness? Fixed my resolutions for a sober, righteous and godly life? And so over-ruled all the events of my being, as to reconcile me to himself, and guide me in the way of duty, and then prepared and fitted me for the most substantial instances of his favour? What may I not expect in consequence of his goodness? How chearfully may I *commit all my ways* to his providence? With what full assurance may I conclude that nothing shall be wanting to compleat my happiness, that his power can effect, and that his goodness and mercy can bestow upon me! *Pardon and renewing grace* are the most *substantial* blessings of human life, the highest favours which God can bestow in the present state. These are the *earnests* of *everlasting mercies*, and preparatives for eternal life and blessedness. These are the surest tokens, that the *great shepherd* will never forsake us, nor abandon us to the evils and uncertainties of the present world, that he will never leave us defenceless and comfortless, that he will continue to us the present blessings we enjoy, or that he will sanctify even our afflictions to
us,

us, teach us rightly to improve them, turn them into substantial blessings to us, that he will give us grace and glory, and no good thing will be ever withhold from them who walk uprightly, or those whose souls he restoreth, and whom he leads into paths of righteousness. All things shall work together for their good: He will be with them in the valley of the shadow of death, and neither time nor eternity shall ever separate them from his love.

S E R M O N VI.

The Certainty of a particular Providence, and the Returns which good Men should make.

PSALM xxiii. 6.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

THE belief of an *immediate special providence*, attending, directing, and guarding us throughout the whole of life, and over-ruling all things for our benefit and advantage, affords the utmost satisfaction and pleasure to the minds of *good men*, and is the great consideration which renders them easy, tranquil and secure, amidst all the numerous uncertainties and dangers to which they are exposed

I have shewn you, that there is in reality no promising ourselves any *continuance* of happiness, nothing that can warrant the expectation of a stable, permanent prosperity, which shall abide with us throughout the whole of our existence, but this principle of the *providence*

94 *Certainty of a particular Providence*, Sermon 6.
dence and government of God, interesting himself in the great events relating to our being, and over-ruling them for our benefit and advantage. If we substitute *chance* or *fate* in the room of God and his providence, the consequence is, that caprice and fickleness itself will have the direction of every thing that belong to us; we may be doomed to a perpetual mutability of condition, or fated to endure a load of evils out of which no power or wisdom whatsoever can extricate. If we suppose all things settled by an original constitution of natural causes and effects, never to be controuled and altered, we can form no just inference from hence of any settled prosperity; because we know not what this settlement is, or whether it be in our *favour* or to our *disadvantage*; and because there are many circumstances, essential to human happiness, which have no dependence on *natural* causes and effects; which therefore however favourable they may prove, may be far from securing or perfecting our felicity. The state of all things in the present world is necessarily subject to mutability and inconstancy; and there is no surer method of disappointment than to form large expectations from them, and to promise ourselves a sure continuance of any kind of earthly prosperity. Man is in his make naturally an imperfect and indigent creature, evidently insufficient for his own happiness, limited in his power and wisdom, and absolutely incapable of guarding and securing himself against the uncertainties and afflictions

afflictions of life ; and therefore needs a superior protection and a surer guidance than his own, in order to establish and perpetuate his welfare. Upon the most extensive and impartial view of things, we can have no solid foundation of confidence and trust, that our happiness shall be lasting, but the protection, favour and blessing of the good providence of God. The *reality* of this providence stands upon the surest foundation of proof. Infinite *wisdom* and *power*, which direct the exercise and administration of it, are able to over-rule all events so as shall subserve the purpose of our happiness; and as *benevolence* and *mercy* are necessary and unalterable properties and characters of divine providence, it justifies the assurance and hope that all things shall be made to work together for this end: Especially considering what I would now add,

4. That the absolute *immensity* and *omnipresence* of God further shews, that the exercise of such a special, constant, particular providence is both *possible* and *easy*. No being can indeed personally act where he himself is *not*; and what bounds his nature limits his operation and influence: And if God were excluded from any part of space, or from any particular place, it would be in vain there to expect any exertions of his power. So far the direction of his providence could not reach: And indeed upon this supposition it must be an extremely partial defective thing; and in consequence hereof, all our expectations from
it

it very uncertain and precarious. For if God be absent from any particular place, how can I be sure he is present where I am? And if he hath no influence where he is not; what influence for my benefit can I expect from him, when it may happen that he is at the greatest distance from me?

But the nature of God can never be bounded or limited. *The heaven, even the heaven of heavens cannot contain him*; he can be comprehended and circumscribed by no possible space or place; but comprehends all things within himself; and therefore is essentially present to all things that exist: And by consequence his active power is every where the same; his inspection of things and persons *universal*, his capacity to over-rule and direct them, subject to no possible failure, and the exercise of his providence at all times, in all places and as to all events equally *easy*, without trouble, difficulty or labour. A consideration, which shews not only the *possibility* of a providential inspection and conduct, but the *reality* and *certainty* of it too: Since as the exercise of it is attended with no molestation, trouble or interruption of happiness to the eternal mind, no reason of any consequence can be assigned, why God should throw up the superintendency of his own works, and lay down a province so highly honourable as that of the government of the world; which instead of being any ways prejudicial to his honour and blessedness, he hath the power to render subservient to his own glory, by making

it the source of innumerable blessings to his creatures. But,

5. The *relation* in which God stands towards us, adds to the life and chearfulness of our confidence in, and expectations from his providence; that our happiness shall be his care, and our true interest consulted by him all our days. The Psalmist begins his sacred composition with this acknowledgment: *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* The *pastoral* office implies constant inspection and care, tenderness for the flock, diligence to preserve them from danger and harm, to lead them into verdant pastures, and water them at the gentle stream. This character is several times ascribed to God in the sacred writings. Thus *Asaph* *, *Give ear, O shepherd of Israel; thou who leadeest Joseph like a flock;* denoting the continuance of God's protection, and his perpetual guidance of his people into the paths of happiness. And the Prophet *Isaiab* †, *Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.* His love of them is tender and constant, his regard extends to every individual, he gives them *all things needful for life and godliness*, and by his Spirit, providence and word, continually provides for their support and welfare. *He shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom*, signifying that the weakest and most defenceless of them shall be tenderly preserved from every destructive harm, and

* Psal. lxxx. 1.

† Isa xl. 10, 11.

nourished till they come to full strength and maturity. . Under this character the saints of ancient ages loved to consider God, as it strengthened their faith and hope in his protection, power and goodness. Hence the same character is applied to *our blessed Lord* in the New Testament, who is in all things the true image of his heavenly Father. *He is the true shepherd, who hath laid down his life for the sheep*: And what character of God is there, that gives greater encouragement to good men than this? A character that implies perpetual watchfulness, constant attendance for their good, peculiar affection and daily defence. *Is God my shepherd? What danger can threaten me, from which his power cannot secure me? What can I want, which his infinite riches cannot supply me with? What difficulties and perplexities can I labour under, out of which his wisdom cannot extricate me? What though all created good be in its nature uncertain and transitory, he can guard and secure me in the possession of it. As he hath the direction of all my paths, he will not suffer me to wander into any destructive evil. Whilst I listen to his sacred voice, and follow the conduct of his providence and word, all my steps will be well ordered; he will teach me to order my conversation aright, and finally cause me to see his salvation.* Upon this foundation I may say with the utmost assurance: *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*

6. This assurance will be yet firmer and more reviving, when it is built upon the experience of past mercy, and the recollection of former favours, which have been bestowed upon us by the good providence of God. It was from hence the Psalmist reasoned, that *goodness and mercy should follow him* throughout the whole of his life; because he had already had many former proofs of the signal care of God, and the peculiar affection that he bore him. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me besides the still waters: Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil: My cup runneth over.* God had brought him through many evils, protected him from the power and malice of his enemies, and secured his prosperity, notwithstanding all their endeavours to prevent it: And from this singular care and watchfulness of God over him, he justly assures himself, that the same goodness should continually follow him, and never leave him destitute even to the end of life. And such a conclusion, drawn by *virtuous and pious* persons, is *rational* in itself; and such as the perfections, providence, covenant and promise of God will abundantly warrant. For the temper and conduct of religious men have the perpetual approbation of God: His affection to them never ceases, his goodness is an eternal, immutable principle, his store of riches subject to no diminution, and his delight to do good without the least variation or shadow of turning. It is our constant and

compleat happiness that he desires and aims at by all his providential dispensations: And therefore the necessary supplies of grace and mercy shall never be refused us; and past favours are so far from being with him any reason to withhold his hand, and lessen the future distributions of his bounty, that they are in themselves, and should be looked upon by all sincere christians, as an earnest of good things to come, and that God will *never leave them nor forsake them*. And the foundation of this confidence is yet stronger, if

7. God hath *blessed us with spiritual blessings*, and shewn his great mercy to us in the noblest and most valuable instances, by the *remission* of our *sins*, the *recovering* us from the power of them, and the bringing us to the love and practice of true religion and virtue. It was on this in an especial manner that the Psalmist promised himself the perpetual continuance of the divine favour. *He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake.* He recovers me from my wanderings, restores me to the love and practice of virtue, and guides me into all righteousness for his mercies sake, that I might have the more abundant reason to magnify and adore his goodness. And indeed unless our experience reaches to this, our conclusion from the past benefits of God, that they shall continue to follow us all our future days, will be but ill-grounded and extremely precarious. *Bad men*, who are not prevailed on by the mercies they receive, to return to their duty,

duty, and to approve themselves by the practice of righteousness to God, have *no* foundation for rational hope and trust in him. Their ingratitude in the abuse of the blessings they receive, is the strongest forfeiture of them, deprives them of all further just expectations from his goodness, and may reasonably excite in them the fear of being forsaken of God, and left destitute of his gracious and providential protection. They have no real security for what they have, nor any just ground to expect the establishment of their prosperity. No, it is by *religion* and *virtue* only that the *constant friendship* of God is to be secured. This is the disposition which alone can fit us for the divine mercy; and if we are conscious to this, that God hath restored us to repentance for past sins, and by his word and Spirit, brought us to the approbation of true goodness, and is perpetually guiding and leading us into the practice of true righteousness; as these are the most convincing instances of the grace and mercy of God, they are the fullest assurance we can have, that the divine goodness shall never fail us, and that nothing shall be ever able to separate us from his love. Hath God *pardoned* my past offences and fully *reconciled* me to his favour? And can I reasonably question whether thus reconciled he will bestow on me the substantial marks and effects of his favour? Hath he prepared me for the continuance of his mercy, fitted me for the receipt of future blessings, and given me the genuine disposition for true hap-

piness, by recovering me to the love and practice of that righteousness, in which he himself delights? And can any conclusion be more reasonable in itself than that he has not given me such a disposition *in vain*, but hath bestowed it on me as an *assurance* that he will withhold no needful good from me? No inference can be more certain than this, that *goodness and mercy shall follow me all my days*, if God hath made me meet to receive the genuine fruits of these: Because the only end of forming us into that meetness for happiness is, that he may bestow upon us every thing necessary to it, and by his power and goodness render it perpetual.

8. Lastly, the Psalmist seems to intimate somewhat farther, viz. *that goodness and mercy shall follow us*, not only *all the days of our lives in this world*, but even after these shall be ended, in that *future world*, into which we shall be removed by death: For says he, *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me: Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.* Which words may mean, that when he shall be passing by death into a *future state*, and walking through that valley of substantial darkness; yet even then, as God had *restored his soul and led him into the path of righteousness*, he would fear no evil, dismiss every terror from his mind; because God would be with him to defend and support him, and by his *rod and staff*, i. e. by his power and pastoral care, to protect and comfort him, and

and bring him *safe* to the happiness and glory of a *better world*. The words seem to intimate and lead us to this sense, agreeable to these words *, *For the Lord is a sun and a shield: The Lord will give grace and glory: No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly*. And it is certain, that the goodness of God shall follow faithful and religious men, when the length of their present days are run out, *beyond the grave*, and into that *unchangeable world*, where their habitation is *for ever*. This is abundantly secured to us by the *gospel* revelation, which expressly declares, that he hath laid up for them that fear him, blessings too great to be here adequately conceived of, or by any words suitably to be described. Yea, it is in this, that the goodness and mercy of God will receive the most illustrious and distinguishing manifestation, in those favours, which shall be bestowed *after death*, and in putting those who fear him into possession of *incorruptible* blessings. The goodness they experience here through the whole of life is but preparative for, and introductory to, the more valuable and durable objects they shall hereafter possess. Now indeed the goodness of God frequently makes no *visible* difference between them and others, their *best* blessings being *internal* and *spiritual*: Hereafter this difference shall appear in the most convincing manner, *when glory, honour, and immortality,*

* Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

acceptance with God, final acquittal from sin, an eternal triumph over death, and an admission to participate of the happiness of the heavenly kingdom, shall be the distinctions that God shall make them known by, to the whole world: And the rewards they shall receive from his immutable and never-failing goodness. So that *the mercies of the Lord are from everlasting to everlasting to those that fear him* †, more durable than life itself, and which deserves the warmest returns of *gratitude*, and to be acknowledged by all who share them in the most solemn manner they are capable of: And this brings me to add a few words to the last thing I observed from this text.

III. That the *experience* of God's past mercy, and the *hope* of his future goodness, should effectually engage us to *offer him the sacrifices of thanksgivings and praise*, and fix our resolutions of *worshipping and serving him for ever*. And *I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever*. The literal rendering of the original words is, and *I will return into the house of the Lord*, to pay my acknowledgements there, *during the continuance of my whole life*.

Good men in former ages paid the highest regard to the *public worship* of God, and thought that the frequenting the house of prayer and praise was both their duty and privilege. They attended it, not as matter of

† Psal. ciii. 17.

mere form and ceremony, not to conform to custom, or to preserve appearances; but with truly religious views, and for the solemn purposes of adoration and worship. They thought that the favours of God's providence deserved to be thus publicly celebrated, counted it their unhappiness when they were debarr'd from this sacred privilege, and with the utmost eagerness of mind longed to be restored to this sacred employment. *As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God: My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: When shall I come and appear before God**. They found the pleasure of a worshipping disposition: They were not ashamed to give their *public testimony* for God, and encourage the reverence due to him from their own example. Their *prosperity* was their motive to religion and godliness; and their hope of its continuance excited the resolution of constantly frequenting the solemnities of his house, and offering their spiritual sacrifices, as the proper expression of their veneration and devotion towards him.

Past blessings *deserve* this acknowledgment: They are, all of them, the *effects* of the *divine goodness* and mercy: They come not by chance and accident. They are owing to the disposals of a friendly providence, consulting our welfare, and so directing all events, as to make them conspire to promote our happiness: And is not gratitude the natural return for

* Psal. xlii. 1, 2.

mercies received? Especially when they are extraordinary and peculiar; either when, notwithstanding the natural instability of all earthly things, they are constant and uninterrupted; or when, after any temporary interruption of them, they are restored, and more firmly established. When God hath delivered us from any threatening evil, and causes us to dwell in security and peace; and gives us the prospect of a lengthened and durable felicity; when God *pardons* our trespasses, *restores* our souls to peace, *inclines* our hearts to virtue and piety, *fixes* us in the dispositions and temper of real holiness, and *leads* us by his Spirit and providence into a sober, righteous and godly life, preserving us from the snares and corruptions of life, and enabling us to maintain our integrity amidst the various temptations that surround us: These and the like are blessings of a substantial nature, require and deserve the warmest acknowledgments of every grateful mind, and should render us habitually disposed to adoration and praise; especially considering

That, as *past* mercies *deserve* this return, so the *hope* of future ones can never be *reasonably* supported without it. He that *forsakes* God, *forakes* his own mercies: He who is destitute of gratitude for what benefits he hath received, forfeits the expectation of farther: And if adoration and praise be not the effect of past obligation; what reasonable hope can we cherish, that *mercy and goodness shall follow us all our days*? Religion in temper and practice

is essentially necessary, to secure the friendship and favour of God; it is the foundation of God's approving us; it is the great support of confidence in his protection and continued goodness; and it is a support that will never fail us. It is what God will always regard with pleasure. *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance doth behold the upright.* And the want of it necessarily tends to deprive us of all interest in the protection and conduct of his providence. Therefore, if we desire the establishment of our own happiness, and the presence and favour of God with us throughout the *whole of life*, it should be our resolution, that *we will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever*; that we will *not forsake the assemblies of his worship*; that we will *solemnly acknowledge our dependence on, and obligations to the God of our lives and mercies*; and that our *returns of gratitude and praise shall be as constant as the supplies of his bounty and goodness.*

We may infer from the whole

1. That *religion and virtue are the only sure methods to obtain the daily continuance of the protection and guidance of divine goodness and mercy.*
2. That it becomes us *frequently to recollect our past experiences of God's benefits, in order to excite a becoming gratitude for past favours, and to establish our hope in the mercy of God for the future.*
3. That the *only foundation of true comfort and of possessing our souls in peace and security,*

108 *Certainty of a particular Providence, Serm. 6.*
rity, amidst the uncertainties, evils and disappointments of life to which we are perpetually subject, is to *confirm* our minds in the *belief* of God's *kind and gracious providence*, mercifully over-ruling all events, and conducting them for the special benefit of those who serve and fear him. Under this persuasion, we may be ever easy, and enjoy our minds with satisfaction and comfort: Wherever we are, whatever dangers we are encompassed with, whatever blessings we possess or want, the providence of an infinitely wise, and good and powerful Being can deliver me from every evil I fear, or shorten the continuance of it, or render it finally a means to promote my happiness; can add security to every possession I have in the present world, and render my future years happy and comfortable as the past, can preserve my life to the natural period of it, or make death void of terror, by the supports of his power and goodness. There is nothing that an *almighty* providence *cannot* do; nothing that is *really* good for us, but what a kind and friendly providence may be expected *actually* to do for us. Let the providence of God therefore, Christian, be thy firm belief. Let *others* talk of *chance* and *fate*, and *natural* causes and effects; and thus expect *constancy* from the *winds*, *substance* from *shadows*, and *realities* from unmeaning *sounds*: Let *thy trust* be in God *who made* beaven and earth. Let the *everlasting* God be thy daily *refuge*, and thou wilt live with a comfort and security, to which *they* must be absolute strangers;

gers; and die with a pleasing prospect and hope, which they can never see disappointed; but which God will abundantly answer, by becoming hereafter *thy portion* and *exceeding great reward*. Further

4. How great a *recommendation* is this of the *divine goodness*, that the *experience* we have of the *past* effects of it, is our *very ground* of *encouragement* to expect all *future* supplies from the continuance of it! Oh, how unlike to human goodness, which is *partial*, *defective*, and *soon tired*! Who would bear to be perpetually solicited by those, who have been greatly beholden to us before? We should scarce probably withhold ourselves from upbraiding them in such a case with the benefits we have conferred upon them: But herein the goodness of God is as high above ours, as the heavens are high above the earth. Though he *gives to all*, and gives *liberally*, yet it is *without upbraiding* the beneficiaries of his providence; as to those on whom he bestows his choicest favours, he does it not to prohibit future hopes, nor to debar them from asking farther. No; the language of the divine mercy in every gift bestowed on good men, is: What I now bestow is but the beginning of greater blessings yet to come. It is to encourage future desires, and to awaken higher expectations, which I will never disappoint. This is the *pledge* I afford thee, that my *mercy shall follow thee all thy days*, and that *eternal blessings* shall be thy *future inheritance* and *portion*. Oh, how rich,
how

from *Certainty of a particular Providence*, Sermon 6.
how adorable is the loving kindness of God!
who can help admiring goodness, thus con-
stant, thus perpetually liberal, and bestowing
eternally successive favours? Who can help
praying with the utmost ardour upon this
view? *Shew me, O Lord, thy mercy, and grant
me thy salvation: Lift up upon me the light of
thy countenance; and this shall put more joy into
my heart, than when wine and oil shall increase.
This is all my salvation and all my hope.*

5. I can't help observing in the last place,
the *admirable composition* of this *incomparable*
ode, which is of the truly *pastoral* kind, in
which the sentiments are almost all taken from
the pastoral life and character, and which,
had it been made by a writer of Greece or Rome,
would have had many pens to illustrate and
celebrate it for its *purity of diction* and *elegance*
of expression and sentiment.

It begins, *The Lord, Jehovah, is my shepherd,
I shall not want.* The shepherd provides for
his flock, and suffers not one of it to perish for
want of its proper food. The flock of God,
be sure, will never be neglected. He knows
every individual that belongs to it, and under
his pastoral care every one shall obtain the
needful supply. *He makes me to lie down in
green pastures.* The word we render *lie down*,
is properly used of *sheep* lying down in their
pastures on their breasts with their feet folded
under them, and denotes both the *abundance*
and *security* they enjoyed. He maketh me to
lie down in green pastures, properly, *grassy*
pastures;

Serm. 6. and Returns good Men should make. 101

pastures: He gives me *plenty*, and makes me *securely* enjoy it. He *leadeth* me *beside the still waters*. The verb is used of the shepherd, softly driving his flock to quench their thirst, at the gentle, slowly gliding brook; where none are in danger of being *swept away* by the *rapid waters*, or *offended* by the *foul and turbid stream*; representing hereby that his enjoyments were *safe, constant, and uninterrupted*. He *restoreth* my *soul*: Properly, he maketh my soul to *turn back*, in allusion to sheep wandering from their fold, and straying from the shepherd's eye and care; whom he seeks, and, when he finds them, brings them back and takes again under his protection; to denote God's *constant inspection* over him, and kindly *reclaiming* him from every deviation from his duty and happiness. He *leads* me *in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake*, in allusion to the shepherd's going before, and leading his sheep into places where he intends to feed or fold them: Representing to us the care of God, in perpetually guiding his steps, and conducting him into the paths of religion and virtue. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil*. The *valley of the shadow of death*, in the *pastoral* style, is properly a *valley obscured* with the thick shade of tall and overspreading trees, *dark as death*, where *wild beasts* and *men of prey* frequently *harbour'd*, and where, if the sheep wander'd, they were in danger of being *devour'd*; especially, if the shepherd was not with

with them, to protect them. Under his care indeed they might securely pasture, and the ravenous beasts would be incapable of molesting them. *In the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil. Thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me.* The valley of the shadow of death, stript of the metaphor, means the passage or approach to death itself, which Job † describes as *the land of darkness and the shadow of death, a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, without splendor, and where the light is as darkness.* Even when entering into this land of darkness, this heavenly shepherd's rod and staff should comfort him. The rod here certainly means the shepherd's crook, by which he number'd, guided and defended his sheep; and the staff, as it is derived from a root, that signifies to uphold and sustain, seems to intend the staff that supported the shepherd himself, especially when he carried the sheep on his shoulders, as the shepherds were sometimes forced to do: And as, applied to God, it means, that he would protect and guide him, and support, strengthen and uphold him; and that this firm persuasion of the divine protection and guidance, and of the supports of his power and grace, when entering into the dark regions of death, would be the comfort and consolation of his soul in that solemn and important hour.

O happy flock! who have the eternal God for their defence, his hand to guide them, his

† Job x. 21, 22.

presence to cheer them in their passage into eternity! O *blessed hope*, that God will then guard us from the enemies that would gladly assault us, scatter the fears that would otherwise invade us, and by his presence cheer and enlighten the heavy gloom that would otherwise oppress us! O! *be with us*, heavenly shepherd, when we walk through this valley of the shadow of death, that we may fear no evil. Let *thy rod and thy staff* comfort us, and guide us safely through this dark passage into thy presence, where there is fulness of joy and pleasures which last for evermore.

S E R M O N VII.

Abiding with GOD in our several
Stations explained.

I COR. vii. 24.

*Brethren, let every man wherein he is called,
therein abide with God.*

W H E N Christianity first appeared in the world, it frequently happened, that some particular persons of a family sincerely embraced it, whilst others in it obstinately continued to reject and oppose it. Sometimes the husband became a believer, whilst the wife remained an irreclaimable heathen. Sometimes the husband was the idolater, and the wife the happy convert to the faith of Christ. Sometimes the slave had the honour of being a free man of the Lord, and lived with a master, who was an enemy to the name and religion of Jesus.

Hence arose several questions of great importance in the Christian church, concerning which the believing *Corinthians* consulted St. *Paul*, and particularly how Christians thus circumstanced were to behave? Whether believing husbands and wives were to depart, or
divorce

divorce themselves from their unbelieving wives and husbands, and how servants were to act, who were so unhappy, as to be under the yoke to masters, who were enemies to the cross of Christ.

The apostle's decision in these cases is agreeable to the rules of equity; for he saith that such Christians, as are married to heathen husbands or wives, are not at liberty to dissolve the matrimonial contract upon account of any difference in religion between them. *Let not the wife depart from her husband, and let not the husband put away his wife* *. And as to the children born of parents differing in religion, the Apostle for the comfort of the believing father or mother, pronounces them *holy, i. e. relatively, or externally holy*; holy as born in the Christian church, and consequently intitled to all the external privileges of it. And as to believing servants, or slaves, who were the property of unbelieving masters, the rule which the Apostle lays down, is: *Art thou, being called a servant, care not for it. Have no doubt or scruple about thy continuance with thy unbelieving master. But if thou canst be made free, use it rather. Obtain thy freedom if 'tis in thy power to do it; otherwise abide with, and serve thy master with fidelity and chearfulness.*

After this, the Apostle adds the words of my text, as a general rule of behaviour to Christians, in all circumstances of life: *Bre-*

* Ver. 10, 11.

thren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God. Whatever be the condition, in which any person is converted to Christianity, whether in a single or married state, whether married to a believer or an heathen, whether he be circumcised or uncircumcised, whether he be bond or free; let him not imagine, that Christianity dissolves any of the great obligations and connections of human life, or exempts him from the duties attending them. In that condition wherein he is converted, *let him abide with God.* If he cannot change it for the better, consistent with his duty, let him continue in it in obedience to God's will, and approve himself faithful in it, in expectation of God's acceptance and reward. *For circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing* †; difference of nation, or condition, or ceremonies, is of no consequence under the gospel; *but keeping the commandments of God.* In speaking to this apostolical exhortation, I shall consider,

I. The nature and import of it. And

II. The necessity and wisdom of regarding it.

I. I am to consider the nature and import of this apostolical exhortation. *Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.*

To be *called* means here to be *converted to Christianity*, in consequence of and obedience to the *call of God* by the gospel of Christ; and the reason and original of the expression

† Ver. 19.

will be understood, by considering, that the word we render *call*, is the term made use of by the *Greek* writers *to invite* any person to a *feast* ||, and that the gospel dispensation is compared to one, because God hath therein made the most liberal provisions for the salvation of all, who are willing to receive them. The *preaching* and publication of the *gospel* is the *call* and *invitation* § of God to come and accept these preparations of the divine bounty; and this call or invitation is as *universal* as the preaching of the gospel; even they who refused to accept of it being expressly stiled *the called*, or the invited of God. But *as many* in this sense *are called*, and *but few* of them *chosen*, the called of God and the called of Christ are expressions *peculiarly* applicable to those who are *called*, and *accept* the call *. Thus St. Paul stiles the *Roman* converts *the called of Jesus Christ*, *called according to God's purpose* †; and as he tells the *Thessalonians*, *chosen to salvation, through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth, and called thereto by his gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ* ‡. And it is in this sense we are to understand the expression in my text. *Let every man, wherein he is called, i. e. in the state in which he is converted to the Christian faith and worship, therein abide with God.*

To *abide* in any place, or condition of life, denotes *continuance*, or *perseverance* therein: And *to abide* in it *with God*, means, continuing

|| Mat. xxii. 1. § Ver. 3. 8. * Rom. i. 6. † Chap. viii. 28.
‡ 1 Theff. ii. 13, 14.

therein, *out of regard to God*, and from a sense of duty to him who hath allotted us our stations, that we may finally secure his approbation and favour. It is a kind of general expression, inclusive of several particulars. As

1. *Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God, i. e.* let him consider his own particular circumstances and condition of life, as the effect of the permission, disposal, and orderance of God's all-wise and gracious providence. Reason teaches us, that as the whole frame of nature is of God's establishment, so it is under his peculiar direction and government. All the relations and connections of things in the *material* world, were originally contrived and fixed by him, who made them subservient to, and dependent on each other, and they are all of them necessary to maintain the order and secure the welfare of the whole. And as all the *natural* powers, faculties and tendencies, the weaknesses, imperfections and wants of *men*, their *relations* by affinity or blood, the *time* of their birth, the *nations* in which they are born, their different *constitutions*, *dispositions* and *geniusses*, as far as *natural*, are unquestionably agreeable to the original purposes of God in creating men, and take place throughout all the different ages of the world, either according to the *settled train* of causes and effects, which he at first established, or some *special directions* and *interpositions* of his providence; they ought all of them to be referred to him, as their *primary* and *directive* cause, and looked on as the

the *appointments* of his sovereign *wisdom* and *pleasure*.

As *society* amongst men is evidently from God, as mankind cannot well subsist, nor the dignity and comfort of human life be maintained without it, it necessarily follows, that all the different *relations, offices, and subordinations* of character and condition, without which society cannot be formed or continued, must be *agreeable* to the original intention of his providence, and may therefore be justly considered as of divine appointment. So that, whatever be that particular condition in which men find themselves placed, and the distinguishing station allotted to them in social life, they should esteem it, not as the effect of mere accident or chance, or an unavoidable fatality, but of the wise œconomy of God, and as permitted and directed by him, to bring about ends worthy the perfections of his nature, and conducive to the general welfare of mankind.

In like manner, the animal qualifications and bodily properties of men, are not perhaps exactly the same in any one single pair in the whole world. The abilities, also intellectual powers, dispositions and capacities of every one, are in many respects *different* from those of others, *lead* them severally to, and *fit* them for as *different* operations, pursuits, and employments. And this manifestly demonstrates, that they were intended by their very make to move in different spheres of life, and designed for very various services and duties.

Now, as whatever is *truly natural*, is certainly *from God*, as its primary author, 'tis as certain, that by forming men with different abilities, dispositions, and inclinations, he thereby qualified and intended them for their different conditions and pursuits; and that all this variety is properly a divine contrivance, and the constitution of the manifold wisdom, and infinite goodness of God. So that whether they are high or low, rich or poor, governors or subjects, masters or servants, bond or free, prosperous or afflicted, disposed for this or the other employment or pursuit, they should regard it, as that particular and distinguishing post and service of life, which it is the sovereign pleasure of the great disposer of all events, that they should attend to and exercise themselves in it.

In this variety of condition and difference of station, character and disposition, that runs through all the various nations of the earth, and the several generations of mankind, there is a real and evident beauty and excellency. Many useful and important duties arise out of them, which could never take place, was there an absolute equality of circumstance, or sameness of disposition amongst all men. From hence arise the *various arts and sciences*, which are of such perpetual utility to nations, which are necessary to polish and refine them, and contribute so highly to the convenience, elegance, and even security of life. By this diversity mankind are firmly linked together, and connected with each other,

other, benevolence and public spirit are excited and cherished, and the mutual dependences of all tend to the safety of individuals, and the strength, the happiness, and preservation of the whole. In a word, without this difference in the states and characters of men, society must disband, commerce absolutely cease, the sources of benevolence be almost wholly dried up, some of the warmest satisfactions of human nature absolutely fail, all valuable improvements be wholly at an end, and the very order and happiness of the world be precarious, and almost impossible to be secured.

And as *reason* and experience thus plainly teach us, that this great diversity in the circumstances of men is the wise orderance of God, so it is the express doctrine of *divine revelation*; which represents him as the every where present, infinitely wise, and all powerful being, as exercising an universal inspection, providence and government, and *ordering all things according to his own good pleasure*. The division of nations, and their separation into their respective countries, is particularly ascribed to him *; for *the most High divided the nations their inheritance, separated the sons of Adam, and determined the bounds of their habitations* †. The general division of mankind into *high* and *low*, *rich* and *poor*, is of his disposition and appointment; for *the poor and the rich meet together, and the Lord is*

* Deut. xxxii. 8.

† Acts xvii. 26.

the maker of them all §, not only as he is their common creator ; but as he hath ordained their lot, and constitutes, by his providence, their different circumstances. For the Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, he bringeth low and lifteth up : Government is of his appointment, for the powers that be are ordained of God † ; and the submission and obedience of subjects expressly provided for by his command ; for we must needs be subject for conscience sake. The different employments of mankind, and their respective capacities for managing them, are from him as their original author, even the most servile and laborious, as well as those which are more easy and honourable. The plowman plows, opens and breaks the clods of his ground, makes plain the face thereof, casts abroad the fitches, scatters the cummin, throws in the principal wheat and the barley, and the rye in their places, for his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him ‡. The knowledge and skill of particular persons in arts and manufactures, and trades, is communicated by him, who fills them with wisdom and understanding, and knowledge in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning work, to work in gold and in silver, and in brass ||. As to the various states and offices in the church of Christ, he gave some Apostles and some Prophets, some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers, furnishing them with gifts, differing according to the grace vouchsafed them, that these different members*

§ Prov. xxii. 2.
 † Isa. xxviii. 24, 29.

* 1 Sam. ii. 7.
 || Exod. xxxi. 3, 4.

† Rom. xiii. 1, 5.

might

might constitute one compact, well tempered body, and by their various services and intimate union, each contribute to the good order and welfare of the whole. In a word, as we are commanded *to acknowledge God in all our ways*, the precept supposes, that he *presides* over them *all*, and hath the universal direction of them. And therefore *to abide with God in that state* in which every one is placed, implies a *firm belief*, and *habitual attention* to this truth: That his particular condition, in all the circumstances of it, take place in consequence of the disposals of divine providence, and is what the wisest and best of beings hath thought proper to appoint him.

2. *Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God, i. e.* as his station is the allotment of God, let him *patiently* and *contentedly* continue in it, *out of regard to him* who hath appointed it; if he cannot change it to his advantage, by such methods as God approves, and as are consistent with the fixed and unalterable rules of Christian piety and virtue. The *Christian church* is like a *large household* or family, over which he presides as the *great father* and *governor*, in which there is a great diversity of characters, offices, and employments, where every one is allotted his proper work, in which he must abide, till his master puts an end to his service, or appoints him to a different station. In the *human body* there are *many members*, variously placed, and for different uses; all of them necessary for the purposes of animal life, and that contribute
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to the perfection, comeliness and advantage of the whole, *so that the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you; that there should be no schism in the body, but that all the members should have the same care one for another* *. These are just representations of that variety, subordination and connection of states which take place in human life, and are as evidently an appointment of wisdom and goodness; by virtue of which no man is to judge for himself, carve out his own lot, or endeavour any alteration in it, *contrary to the will of God, or by any methods which he hath disapproved*. This would bring confusion into the affairs of the world, and destroy that mutual dependence, harmony and regularity, which God would have kept up, and continually established. It would be a criminal invasion of his constitution, and what must therefore expose men to his displeasure, as the wise and benevolent governor of the world.

If indeed *he points* out any alteration in our circumstances, give us a *fair opportunity* to better our condition, and *providentially leads* us into the *means* of effecting it; every wise man will thankfully accept and use them; and it is our duty to observe the steps, and follow the conduct of his providence; to go where he directs us, and assume and serve in that post of life, to which he invites us. The exhortation of my text, *Let every man, wherein*

* 1 Cor. xii. 21—25.

he is called, therein abide with God, relates peculiarly to *slaves*, who were become converts to Christianity. But that St. Paul did not mean, that every slave should always continue a slave, appears from the foregoing verses. For though he says in general terms: *Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he is called**; he immediately adds, to exemplify his precept: *Art thou called being a servant†*, or slave, *care not for it*; take up quietly with thy lot, *i. e.* if it appear to be the will of God that thou shouldest continue such; for he subjoins, to explain and qualify the precept: *But if thou may'st, ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ δύνασαι, if thou canst be made free, if thou canst purchase, or otherwise fairly attain thy freedom, use it rather, and recover thy liberty.* In like manner, though every one is to *abide* and continue in his own proper post, yet this is not to be understood, as that every man must always look upon himself as absolutely and inevitably tied down to the present condition in which he is; and from an imagination, that God hath immutably decreed what his circumstances shall be, never fairly attempt to mend them, or rise from the lower stations of life to more plentiful and honourable ones. Rather, if God favourably disposes things to bring them into a more easy, happy, useful situation, they should gratefully embrace the kind opportunity he presents them, and improve it with a suitable diligence and care.

* Ver. 20.

† Ver. 21.

But

But then, as providence never leads men into any kind of prosperity by measures *contrary to righteousness and truth*, nor allows any such means to be made use of; as are contrary to the great laws of religion and virtue; the poor must not rise to riches by fraud and injustice; the slave must not obtain his liberty, by deserting his master's service without permission; the low must not advance themselves to honour and preferment, by methods of corruption, treachery, and violence; the distressed and afflicted are not to procure ease and prosperity, by renouncing their principles, forsaking their profession, or by any measures of wickedness and vice. This is not *abiding with God* in the state in which we are, but is a direct violation of his orders, a very *criminal departure from him*, and the duty we owe him, and an iniquitous and dishonourable desertion of that post which he hath assigned us; and whatever are the advantages we may secure by such an evil conduct, they will be found at last to be no equivalent and balance to those substantial and durable evils, which the forfeiture of his favour, and the just effects of his displeasure will sooner or later expose us to.

3. Let every man *abide with God* in that condition in which providence hath placed him, by *cheerfully submitting to all the inconveniencies of it, out of regard to the appointment and orderance of God*. The distributions of his providence are all made with the most perfect and comprehensive view of all the possible consequences

consequences that can arise from them, and are not hasty dispositions of mere *undirected arbitrary will* and *sovereign pleasure*, without any fore-knowledge of, or regard had to the tendencies and effects of them, in which the nature, different powers, and various capacities of mankind have not been prudently and kindly consulted. And therefore when he determined to permit and appoint that great diversity of states, which hath constantly taken place throughout all nations and ages of mankind, and more or less subsisted ever since their original formation; it was, from the most certain and distinct view of all their connections and possible effects, he foresaw this would be the *best* and *wisest constitution*, and upon the whole, the fittest plan on which he could carry on the designs of his moral providence and government over mankind.

And therefore whatever are the *inconveniencies* and *disadvantages* of that condition in which we are placed, as they were all of them clearly *foreseen* by God, that condition would never have been permitted and allotted to any one's particular share, had not God known, that all circumstances considered, it would have been the *fittest for him*, and the inconveniencies attending it such as were equitably suited to his distinguishing temper and disposition; such as he would be most capable of supporting under, and improving finally to his best advantage and highest interest. To abide therefore with God in such a condition of being, is *humbly and chearfully to acquiesce in it,*
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to refrain from discontent and murmuring, not to censure the ways of God as partial, unequal, or unfriendly, not to envy others in higher stations, nor to repine that things are not with us according to our wishes, and that we want those advantages and gratifications of life, which others attain to, and which we may have been eagerly and continually pursuing.

What, if thy circumstances are *low*, and thy condition that of *dependence* and *want*? Hast thou not reason to conclude, that because God would have it so, it is really *more for thy benefit* than plenty and abundance, and that he intends to make thy necessities instrumental to prepare thee for better things; and what should give thee no small pleasure, subservient to promote the future salvation and happiness of those who know thy wants, and have the ability and inclination to minister to the relief of them? Canst thou be sure that *prosperity* would, on the whole, have been any *real* blessing to thee; that thou wouldest not have been undone by the snares attending it; that thou wouldest not have made gold thy god by a sordid, avaricious temper, or lavished thy riches in those criminal, luxurious indulgencies and pleasures, in which we see so many dissipate and abuse them? Complain not therefore, till thou canst as certainly know as God doth, what the consequences of plenty would have been to thee; and persuade *thyself* to think, that he hath carved out thy lot much better for thee, than if he had gratified the
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fond wishes, and thoughtless desires of thy heart.

Art thou exercised with *perpetual disorders of body*, and liable to those constantly returning infirmities, that prevent thy enjoying and relishing the comforts of life, and discharging the duties of it with that assiduity and cheerfulness thou wishest to do? Are these weaknesses and disorders the *effects of criminal imprudences*, and *irregular gratifications*? Remember then, that as these consequences of thine actions are of God's original appointment, they are intended by him to *correct* thee for thine errors, to heal thee of thy moral disorders, and save thee from a more aggravated and durable misery; *kiss then the rod* and him that holds it; because it is with the kindest intention he hath permitted thee to be afflicted. If such disorders are *constitutional*, or plainly *providential*, there is still abundant reason for thy most patient and quiet submission to them; because the permissions and appointments of God are founded in the highest reason, and when the scheme of his providence comes to be unfolded, and the reasons of his conduct to be clearly represented to us, all will appear worthy his character, as an infinitely good and perfect being. Perhaps the feeble frame and valetudinary constitution may have been one principal means of thy *preservation* from those *destructive liberties*, into which otherwise thou mightest have ran; and if thy piety and seriousness of mind, thy government of thy passions, thy integrity and constancy

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in virtue, and thine established growing meetness for the happiness of a better life, be in any measure owing to the disorders and illnesses thou art apt to complain of and repine at; thou art so far from having any good reason to murmur at thy lot, that thou hast rather cause to say unto God: *In very faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.* In a word, whatever be the disadvantages of the condition thou art in; and whether they be greater or lesser; support them with a becoming dignity and fortitude, and let the consideration, that they are God's allotment, reconcile thee to them, and bring thee to that intire patience and resignation under them, that is both thine interest and duty.

4. *Abide with God* in thy proper station, by *faithfully discharging all the several obligations resulting from it*, and the duties that stand connected with it; as firmly believing they have the *sanction* of the divine authority, fully apprized of thy being continually under God's *inspection*, and finally *accountable* to him for thy conduct. The *variety of conditions* that take place in human life was, amongst other reasons, unquestionably permitted and ordained for this, that men might be brought under as great a variety of engagements, and have an opportunity for practising those *different kinds* of excellent virtues, that peculiarly belong to them, and which could not have taken place, had their conditions been all equal, or their situations in the world been exactly the same. For every different state of life

life hath its own distinguishing duties belonging to it, and which result from and become no other station whatsoever. There are indeed some *common* obligations that all men and Christians are brought under, that are essential to them as such, and which therefore all of them are equally bound to observe. But then there are others *more limited* and *special*, which are determined only by particular circumstances, and which belong to some only and not to others. The duties of the *rich*, as such, are of one kind; those of the *poor*, as such, of another. Some virtues become, more especially the *high* and *honourable*; others, those who are in the *lowest* classes of life. *Prosperity* and *adversity* require a very different temper and conduct, and those dispositions and actions which are natural and ornamental to the one, would be highly improper, and look like affectation, or appear quite indecent in the other.

Now as these duties necessarily arise out of that variety of states, which owe their being to the divine order and appointment, they must be equally of a *divine constitution* with the states they result from, and be all of them enforced by the supreme authority of God. And the condition that every man is placed in, points out to him most certainly what God particularly requires of him, and what is *his good and perfect and acceptable will concerning him*; and it is almost impossible, that any one of a good heart, and honest disposition of mind, can ever be at a loss, in the general course

course of his life, what part to act, or to know how he may *walk so as to please God*, and finally secure his approbation. His very distinguishing circumstances in the world teach him this, and his own rank in life is his constant monitor and instructor. And as God is the constant inspector of all men, who act continually under his immediate view, and are finally accountable at his tribunal for their behaviour in the posts he hath assigned them; 'tis impossible that he can be indifferent as to their conduct, approve them when they act out of character, desert their post, forget their duty, refuse to perform it, or willingly act in contradiction to it: Or that he should not behold them with a favourable eye, when they discharge their part well, and act with diligence and fidelity in the stations he hath appointed them.

Abide therefore with God wherein soever thou art called. Consider what the dispositions of mind are thou oughtest in an especial manner to exercise, and carefully cultivate and improve them. Seriously and frequently recollect, what behaviour that is which becomes thy circumstances, and regulate thy whole conduct with true *propriety* and *decency*. True religion leads directly to this, and the usefulness, order and comfort of life, in great measure depends on it; and as to social happiness, 'tis impracticable without it. When men forget themselves, and the obligations arising out of their respective circumstances; when they impertinently intrude themselves
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into the provinces of others, and overlook what is incumbent on themselves in their own; when through criminal affections, and strong propensities to sensual gratifications and pleasures, they trample upon all the original obligations which God and nature have laid them under, and live in an habitual violation of their proper duty; they become not only *unprofitable* but *hurtful*; they contradict the very design of their being, run counter to the order, and break in upon the constitution of the most high God, and incur the penalty of those who break their rank, quit their post of duty, and set themselves up in opposition to his supream authority and command.

Keep therefore, Christian, within that sphere of action the wisdom of providence hath assigned thee to move in. Thou shouldst not leave thy own province, to busy thyself about another's, that no way belongs to thee. Every man hath his *own work* to do, and *let every man prove* and rightly perform it, and then *he shall have rejoicing in himself, and not in another*. Christianity lays great stress upon this, points out the duties of every condition and character, and makes our acceptance with God through Christ, and our final happiness in his favour, in great measure, dependent on our performing them. *Art thou rich and prosperous in this world*, and hast thou little or nothing to mix with thy enjoyments and imbitter thy comforts? *Be not high-minded, but fear. Place not thy happiness, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all*

things richly to enjoy. Be soberly joyful in thy prosperity, whilst it continues, and prepare for the alteration to which all temporal happiness is subject. Let thy enjoyments be mixed with gratitude to God the giver of them, and look upon thy various blessings as so many motives and arguments to a more exemplary obedience to his will. *Do good, be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, and lay up in store for thyself a good foundation against the time to come, that thou mayest lay hold of eternal life.* Is thy lot cast amongst the poor and afflicted? *In the day of adversity consider.* Be rich in faith, poor in spirit, humble, meek, patient, resigned, and contented. Walk in thine integrity, and commit thyself to the Lord. To thy superiors be submissive, thankful to thy benefactors, in thy labours of life diligent, and in thy proper calling more abundantly industrious. Be rather careful how to improve afflictions, than absolutely to get rid of them. Keep closer to God by prayer, and be more earnest in supplicating his assistance, *and grace to help thee in every time of need.* converse much with another world, and *look not only or principally to the things which are seen, which are temporal, but to the things which are not seen, which are spiritual and eternal.*

And as every state, so every relation of life hath its proper duties connected with, and resulting from it, particularly specified and inculcated in the gospel revelation. Rulers are to consider themselves as *the ministers of God,*
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for the public good, to be terrors to evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. And subjects must submit themselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or to governors sent by him, for the administration of justice; to render tribute, custom, fear, and honour, to whom they are respectively due, and to pray for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Children are to obey their parents in the Lord, and parents are not to provoke their children to wrath. Wives are to care for the things of the world, so as that they may please their husbands, and husbands to love their wives, even as Christ loved also the church, Servants are to be obedient to their masters as unto Christ, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; and masters are to behave with equity and moderation to their servants, knowing that they have a master also in Heaven, with whom there is no respect of persons. The Elders and Bishops of the church are to feed the flock of God, taking the oversight thereof not by constraint but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over the heritage, but as examples to the flock; and they who are taught in the word are to communicate to them that teach them in all good things, to know them that labour amongst them, and are over them in the Lord, and admonish them, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work sake, and to receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save their souls.

And indeed there can scarce be a stronger and surer argument of *our integrity* in our Christian profession, than our minding every one his *proper duty*, and behaving according to the peculiar obligations our own circumstances in life lay us under. This shews that our faith is genuine and lively, and that the principles we believe have made a right impression upon our minds; that we consider ourselves as continually under the divine inspection, and accountable to God; that we have a due reverence of him upon our hearts, and labour to be accepted of him. And without this conscientious care to approve ourselves to him, there is too much reason to fear, that our religion will be at last found to have been in vain.

S E R M O N VIII.

Abiding with GOD farther explained.

I C O R. vii. 24.

*Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called,
therein abide with God.*

IN speaking to these words I am to consider,

- I. The nature of this apostolical exhortation. And
- II. The necessity and wisdom of regarding it.

As to the nature of this exhortation, *to abide* in every state in which we are placed *with God*, I have observed, that as the expression of *abiding with God* is a general one, so it may denote several very important things; and particularly, that every one should *consider* his own particular condition of life, as the *effect of the permission and appointment of God*; that he should *continue therein*, out of regard *to his will*, if he cannot change it to his advantage by such methods as God approves; that he should *cheerfully submit* to all the inconveniencies

conveniencies of it, in obedience to God, who foresaw them, and for wise and good reasons permitted them to take place; and, finally, that he should *faithfully discharge the great duties* resulting from it, because they have the sanction of *God's authority*, and with the *hope* of his *commendation and acceptance*. Let me add farther on this subject :

5. Let every one *abide with God* in his own proper station, by *guarding against the special and peculiar temptations* that arise out of it, knowing that God permits them, as the trial of his fidelity and constancy. He intended the present life should be a state of *probation*, and therefore is pleased to suffer various temptations to befall us, without which there could be no real probation of us at all; and our being subject to them is every way becoming his character, as the wise and equitable governor of the world, and arises out of our natures as conscious and moral agents, endowed with liberty, and freedom of choice; and as such capable of being influenced by different views and passions, and drawn into various measures and pursuits. And here God hath dealt very impartially with all mankind, by suffering temptations to grow up out of every circumstance of being that can possibly be named, that the integrity and constancy of all may be duly sifted, and none partake of the eternal recompence of reward, till he hath approved himself fit for, and worthy of it, by his resolution and perseverance in the hour of temptation.

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In that remarkable prayer of *Agur*, that God would give him *neither poverty nor riches*, when he assigns the reason of his request, he plainly points out the snares of both, and what were the sins to which each condition severally led. *Give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say: Who is the Lord? And give me not poverty, lest I steal, and take the name of my God in vain* *. And different as the two extremes of riches and poverty may seem, yet from the earliest ages it has been found generally true, that prophaneness and contempt of God have arisen out of both; the *rich*, by means of their very abundance, being willing and apt to think themselves *independent* and *unaccountable* to God; and by having it in their power to gratify all their passions and appetites, insolently to cry out: *Who is the Lord* that he should controul us, or we pay any regard to his authority and presence? And as to the *poor*, their very poverty is a temptation to them to supply their necessities by illicit and criminal measures, to throw off all those considerations of God's providence and government, that should reconcile them to their condition, and to *prophane his name*, either through envy at the prosperity of others, or impatient under their own difficulties and wants. What greatly contributes to this irreligion and impiety is the *want of education*; or the *false* and *bad education* of persons, in these two different circumstances of life;

* Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

the very rich and the very poor being too generally brought up without any due knowledge of or reverence for God, and formed into sensuality and contempt of religion from their earliest youth. And though the *middle* state of life is commonly the *safest*, and the freest from the most dangerous and powerful temptations; yet even in this men have their trials, and there can be no condition of human nature in this world named, that is wholly and constantly free from all solicitation and danger by them.

Now whatever are the temptations that fall to any one's particular share, instead of yielding to them, and complying with the inducements that are presented him to any particular kinds of sins, he should immediately consider them, not as *baits* intended, on the part God, to prompt and seduce him into guilt and destruction, but as the *peculiar trials* of his constancy and integrity, and to give him an opportunity of approving himself to his great Lord and Master, by the firmness of his resistance to them, and his resolution and fortitude in overcoming them. As no man is without his temptations, if the plea of temptation were an excuse for *any one's* vices, it would be an excuse for *every one's*; and therefore upon this foundation, all the various corruptions and crimes of men would be really justifiable, and there could be no judgment of God to which they could be subject, nor any punishment they could deserve from his impartial justice. It is therefore no reasonable plea for
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the sins of any man, that he was tempted to commit them, when he might, and ought to have resisted the temptation; and had all the necessary means afforded him, by reason and revelation, to strengthen his opposition to, and secure him the victory over it.

If then thy *state of life* is attended with any special motives to prophaneness, forgetfulness, and contempt of God; or any of those crimes that argue an impious, irreligious disposition: If the temptations that befall thee are *constitutional*, arising out of the state and temperature of thy passions and affections; if thy prevalent inclination be to pride, anger, envy, malice and revenge; if to covetousness, and an immoderate love of the world; if to the sensual gratifications of drunkenness and impurity; if thou art *encompassed* with the *alluring prospects* and *baits* of riches and honours; if presented with the favourable *opportunities* of oppression, fraud, injustice, and all the iniquitous measures and means of wicked and ungodly gains, in the way of trade and commerce; if thy danger arises from *straits* and *difficulties*, and various *afflictions* of life, and thou art hereby prompted to murmuring, fretfulness of spirit, censuring God's providence, reproaching his name, cursing thy own condition, or any forbidden and guilty methods to alter it for the better; whatever thy temptation be, or from whencesoever it proceeds, *guard thy heart* against the insinuating evil, *keep it with all diligence*, instantly subdue every rising tendency to a concession, or compliance

pliance with the fatal counsel suggested to thee, and never suffer thy passions to betray thee into measures of vice; out of which a retreat is always difficult, and from which 'tis too often found, by sad experience, that there is no method of escape. He who, by *impressing the awes of God* upon his mind, recurring habitually to the great principles and motives of religion, and a constant care to secure the protection and assistance of God, by *duly asking grace to help him in every time of need*; fortifies himself against the snares of life, and the various inducements to sin that every where present themselves to him; who secures himself against their impression and influence, maintains his integrity under them, and preserves himself free from the guilt in which they would involve him; such a one doth truly *abide with God* in that condition which is allotted him, as he resists those enemies of his virtue and happiness, to which God hath commanded him to maintain a constant opposition, secures that victory over them to which God calls and animates him, and as he hereby approves his fidelity in that sacred warfare to which God hath called him.

6. *Let every man, wherein he is called, abide with God*, by being *habitually thankful* to him for all the various blessings of his condition, as knowing that they are the effects of his providential care and kindness, and deserve to be improved to the sincerest and warmest gratitude. It hath been observed under a
fore-

foregoing head, that there is no state of life without its attending inconveniencies, and that doth not require some measure of fortitude and patience. It may be as truly remarked, that there is *no* condition but what hath its *peculiar mercies*; no circumstance into which providence brings men, but there is some mixture of good as well as evil, somewhat that is an occasion for praise as well as resignation. *Some* persons have an almost *perpetual* flow of *prosperity*, and they can with truth take up the acknowledgment of the Psalmist, that *goodness and mercy have followed them all their days*. Their plenty hath been ever full, and their enjoyments perpetual, without any considerable interruption and disappointments to imbitter their lives, or take away the relish of the blessings they have possessed. The condition of others is more *mixed*; afflictions have succeeded mercies, or mercies followed afflictions; their blessings have been lowered by the evils that have accompanied them, or their calamities have been alleviated by some seasonable and suitable favours that have been providentially afforded under them. As to some, the afflictions of life may seem greatly to overbalance the share of good that is allotted them, and they have been almost all their days forced to grapple with difficulties and strait circumstances, or distressed by the private affairs of their families, or exercised with the perpetual disorders of a valetudinary, distempered constitution, or been harrassed incessantly with other kinds of
uneasiness

uneasiness and distress. But even in such situations, if the enquiry be impartially pursued, and the dealings and steps of divine providence traced out with that care and impartiality which they ought to be, there will be found very evident arguments of the divine goodness, and sufficient reasons for the exercise of a grateful and thankful disposition towards God.

And if *all* are thus, in greater or lesser measures *beholden* to God, and share the effects of his bounty, *all* should be diligent in *recollecting the favours* that he hath bestowed upon them, should never forget his kindness, should frequently enquire: *What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits, and call upon their souls, and all that is within them, to bless the name of God.* To be unmindful of him, and our obligations to his goodness, is inexcusable in all; but in those more especially, who have been signally favoured, and distinguished above others by the number, or kind, or never-failing continuance of the mercies they have received. Gratitude in them should be an habitual disposition, and when the whole of life is filled up with uninterrupted blessings, the heart should be continually meditating, suggesting, and paying the most ingenuous returns and acknowledgments of affection, praise and duty.

And as to the *afflictions* of life, they are sometimes *real blessings*, and may always be *improved*, in some respect or other, to the advantage of those who are exercised by them; and

and it hath frequently been the case, that good men themselves have with pleasure owned, that God hath *in very faithfulness afflicted* them; and seen, from the good effects they have experienced, the utmost reason to confess, that how severe and grievous soever their trials. have been esteemed by them, whilst they were labouring under the heavy pressure of them, yet that they have eventually proved some of the happiest circumstances of their lives, and that they would not have been without them for any considerations whatsoever.

Sometimes the *goodness* of God discovers itself in the *nature* of the *affliction* permitted; it being, perhaps, the only one, which they could have borne up under with decency, and been capable of improving aright to their own best advantage and interest. Sometimes the divine benevolence hath appeared in the *season* and *duration* of the affliction; befalling them just time enough to prevent some fatal and destructive error of life, or when their temper and other circumstances best fitted them to struggle with and bear up under it, and lasting no longer, than 'till some salutary purpose hath been answered by it. Sometimes God hath manifested his care to persons in affliction, by the gracious and unexpected *assurances* and *seasonable supports* that he hath vouchsafed them, whereby they have been carried through their trials to their own wonder and surprize, and much beyond what

they themselves could ever have imagined or hoped for. Sometimes the *good effects* of afflictive evils have been the substantial proofs, that they have been the appointments of mercy and goodness. Strong habits of sin have been effectually broken, repentance hath been excited, and rendered sincere and effectual; inordinate passions have been corrected and subdued, and bad inclinations and propensities greatly weakened or extirpated: particular graces have been improved and rendered more influential; neglected duties have been revived, and returned to with redoubled ardour and seriousness; a more thorough and deep concern for the acceptance of God, and securing eternal happiness hath been awakened, and impressed upon the heart and conscience; and, in a word, the ability and disposition for every good word and work, and for final salvation in the presence and kingdom of God, have been highly promoted and carried on nearer and nearer to full perfection.

In all these instances, there are abundant causes of *thankfulness* to God; and therefore whatever be thy circumstances, look not only to the dark and uncomfortable part of the prospect, nor sullenly confine thy views to what afflicts and grieves thee; but open thy heart to the pleasures of gratitude, by a careful attention to the share of mercy that hath been allotted thee, and defraud not God of the tribute of praise thou owest him, nor thyself of the honour and satisfaction of presenting this
sacred

sacred sacrifice before him. If thy *circumstances* are *low*, bless God that thy *strength* is *firm*, and thy *spirits* *cheerful* and *lively*. If *thou art called, being a servant*; care not for it, but be glad that thou art *free in Christ*, and shalt hereafter receive the inheritance of a *child of God*. Is thy constitution *feeble* and *disordered*? Be thankful thou art *not* at the same time in pressing *straits* and *difficulties*, and destitute of the supports and assistances that are necessary to thy relief, and forced to conflict with the united evils of distemper and poverty. If even this should be thy lot, remember with thankfulness 'tis *less than sin deserves*, that these afflictions are but *comparatively light*, and can *last but a season*; and that if thou art careful rightly to improve them, they shall *work out for thee a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. If thou meetest with disappointments *abroad*, from the assistance of those friendships thou hadst reason to think thou mightest have depended on, bless the name of God, that the circumstances of thy *own family* are desirable, and that thou hast no domestick crosses to solicit and distress thee. If thy *children die*, be thankful that they are not *vicious* and *profligate*, and that they are *removed* from the *snare*s and *evils* that are to come. If their courses should be *some* of them bad, or their circumstances *unprosperous*; acknowledge God's goodness, that 'tis not the case of *all* of them; or if even this should happen, there is room for gratitude and praise, when

thou remembereſt how God hath *preſerved thee* from the ſame calamities and crimes. If thou art bending under the *infirmities* of age, and findeſt all the natural props of life decaying, and gradually ſinking by diſtemper and pain: be thankful for the various *mercies* of thy *paſt* life, the bleſſings thou *aſtually* enjoyeſt to render the inconveniencies of old age ſupportable, and thoſe *ineſtimable good things that God hath laid up for them that fear him*, and will hereafter beſtow on thee as thine eternal portion and *exceeding great reward*. In a word, review thy condition, whatever it be, and carefully conſider all the circumſtances of thy caſe, and thou wilt moſt clearly diſcern numerous proofs of God's care and kindneſs, that have attended thee. *Abide therefore with God*, by the exerciſe of that unfeigned, chearful and warm *gratitude* towards him, which is a continual ſacrifice that he will not deſpiſe.

7. *Let every one abide with God*, in whatſoever ſtate he is placed, by *maintaining a daily intercourſe and communion with him*, in the conſtant, ſerious exerciſe of all the duties of true piety and devotion, in a religious uſe of all thoſe means of grace which God hath appointed for his ſpiritual improvement, and the promoting and ſecuring his final ſalvation and happineſs. This is the meaning of that emphatical expreſſion in the ſacred writings, *walking with God*; parallel with which is this in my text, of *abiding with God*; and it is a
genuine

genuine description of all truly pious and sincere Christians, whose life is a continual converse with God by prayer and thanksgiving, and a regular attendance on all the institutions of divine worship. This is also called in the language of scripture, *waiting upon God*, and *drawing near to him*; because in the exercises of a rational devotion, the desires of the heart are immediately directed to, and all its best expectations center in him, as the great and indefectible source of perfection and blessedness. It is by this that the mind intimately approaches to, and unites itself with this most excellent of all beings; when by close meditation, all its thoughts rise to, and terminate on him, when it sets itself in his presence, brings him as it were down to its own direct and nearest view, exercises a lively faith in his perfections and promises, increases its veneration and affection for him, unbosoms all its wishes and wants to him as *the Father of mercies*, and *the God of grace*, commits itself to his protection, patronage, and assistance, calls him in to its immediate aid, and obtains those comforts and consolations that are not small, that *peace of God which passeth all knowledge*, which tends to confirm and establish all its best purposes and resolutions, to maintain its integrity unblameable, and to increase its meetness for the enjoyments and glory of the world to come.

There is no possible situation of our beings, in which thus to *abide with God* is not our duty

and *interest*. Let our *plenty* be ever so great, and our circumstances as *prosperous* as can be wished: yet what *security* have we for the continuance of our prosperity, or for the capacity to enjoy it, or for wisdom and resolution not to abuse it, but the favour and friendship of God? Numerous, and of various kinds, are the wants that encompass us, and return every moment of our existence; and the only sure supply of them is his never-failing care and goodness. Many are the evils of life and dangers of the present state relating to soul and body, to which we are perpetually subject, which oftentimes we cannot foresee, or if we could, should not be able to prevent; from which only his all-controuling providence can protect us, under which, should we be permitted to fall into them, his grace alone can support us, out of which the interposition of his wisdom and power is necessary to extricate us, and the true improvement of which his good Spirit only can effectually teach us. How various are the *temptations* that arise out of every condition of our beings, to lead us off from the path of our duty, and seduce us into those guilty measures that might prove the forfeiture of our eternal salvation? Should we not therefore so *abide with God*, as continually to beseech him, that no temptation may overtake us that is beyond our strength, and that with every one that befalls us, *he will make a way for our escape out of it*, and by *manifesting his strength*

in our weakness, enable us to bear it, so as that he may be glorified in and by us, and our integrity may be clearly evidenced, and finally approved? How frequently do we need the *counsel* and *direction* of God, to manage our affairs, relating to time and eternity, with prudence and success, to lead us safely through those uncertainties and intricacies of life, that often perplex and entangle us, and render us at a loss how to order our steps, and determine our resolutions? And doth not this shew us the necessity and prudence of habitually looking to and conversing with God, and of humbly and earnestly asking from him that *wisdom* which we want, *who giveth liberally and upbraideth not*? The serious frame, the *power of godliness*, and the universal *prosperity of our souls*, depend in great measure on our abiding with God, in the use of all the appointed means and instruments of true piety and goodness. The genuine *satisfaction* of life, the comforts of a religious course, and the *pleasing hope* and *assurance* of final salvation, are not in the ordinary way ever to be obtained without it. The *best relish* of all present enjoyments, and the firmest *support* under all afflictive evils will be, in great measure, or wholly wanting, if we neglect this sacred correspondence with God, and are habitual strangers to this holy commerce with the best of beings. Our *ability* and *disposition* for the *duties* of our Christian calling and character will want their best support, and the life of

God within us languish and decay, unless maintained and improved by those sacred transactions. *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength*, is a promise to which good men will subscribe their experience in every age; and it was the character of the saints of God in the most ancient times; *we have waited for thee, the desire of our souls is to thy name, and the remembrance of thee**; and the sure and invaluable benefit that attended it was: *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusted in thee.*

Whatever therefore be thy condition, Christian, whether rich or poor, high or low, bond or free, afflicted or prosperous, *abide thus and walk closely with God*; have a constant respect to this invisible being; let thy *meditations of him be sweet*, thy converse with him habitual, and keep up a warm spirit of lively devotion, by offering every day thou livest the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving; neglect not to *assemble* thyself with the *worshipping people of God*, love to be where he is more especially present, and where his word hath been so often found the powerful means of converting sinners, and establishing and confirming those who have believed; nor absent thyself from those *solemnities*, where the grace of God, in thy redemption by the Lord Jesus, is exhibited in the most affecting view, and

* *Ps. xxvi. 3, 8.*

all the various circumstances of the love of Christ represented in so lively a manner, as to carry in them the most powerful motives and constraints to engage thee to yield thyself more entirely to the Lord, *and glorify him with thy soul and body, which are his.* If thus thou abidest with God, every condition of life will be safe and happy, thou wilt have the continued experience of the divine presence with thee, God will *give thee grace and glory, and withhold from thee no good thing that is essential to thy happiness.*

SER.

S E R M O N IX.

Other Instances of abiding with GOD
represented.

I COR. vii. 24.

*Brethren, let every man wherein he is called,
therein abide with God.*

TO *abide with God*, as Christians, in those circumstances of life in which he hath placed us, is a very comprehensive expression, and implies every one's *regarding* his own condition and station as the *allotment of God*; his *continuance* in it in *obedience* to the will, and during the pleasure of God; his *quietly and patiently submitting* to all the necessary inconveniencies of it, out of regard to the permission and appointment of God; his *faithfully discharging* all those important *duties* that belong to it, in submission to the command and authority of God; his *guarding against* all the *temptations* that arise out of it, as knowing himself finally accountable to God; his being *habitually thankful* for all the various blessings he enjoys in it, as sensible that

that he owes them to the goodness of God; his *keeping up a daily intercourse with God*, in the constant serious exercise of all the instances of a real piety and rational devotion, regarding them as the appointments of God for his improvement, establishment, and comfort; and what I would now add further is: That our abiding with God in the respective conditions in which he hath placed us, implies,

8. Our *maintaining*, whatever be our condition and circumstance of life, an *humble, cheerful hope of God's acceptance*, and in the way of our duty never questioning his affection and friendship towards us. This is evidently implied, in what the Apostle says: *Art thou being called a slave? Care not for it.* Thy reward as a Christian is equally secure, as though thou wast thyself a master. *For he that is called in the Lord, being a slave, is the Lord's freeman.* In Christ's account he is in a full state of liberty, and entitled to the protection and favour of his Lord. The difference of mens worldly states creates no difference of disposition in God towards them, for as their various stations are equally the allotments of his all wise providence, they are as such regarded by him with equal approbation and complacency. It is not therefore outward condition, but the real moral character to which God looks. *The poor in this world, if rich in faith*, and in good works, are dearer to him than those that *spend their days in wealth*, and can *boast themselves in the multitude of their possessions*, if destitute of the principles of religion,

ligion, and the prevailing habits of a real goodness; those true riches, and noblest ornaments of the reasonable mind. And wherever those graces and virtues dwell, which are the fruits of the Spirit, and essential to the Christian character and conversation, there is a sure foundation for trusting in God through Christ, and all the promises of the gospel justify and strengthen the hope of acceptance here, and eternal blessedness and glory hereafter. And this hope the faithful Christian should continually cherish, in every circumstance of being. Hath God placed thee in the *superior* condition of wealth and plenty? Hast thou rightly *improved* and *employed* the abundance he hath bestowed on thee? Hath thy prosperity in the world been enjoyed with moderation, and hast thou been useful in some good proportion to the advantages thou hast possessed? Hath it increased thy *gratitude* to God thy benefactor, and thy study and care *to do those things that are pleasing to him*? Imagine not then that thou hast thy *portion in this life* §; but look on the present blessings of providence, as the earnest of a more glorious prosperity; and please thyself with the expectation of those never-failing treasures that shall be thy future and everlasting reward. Hast thou borne the disadvantages of a *low* condition in life with *resignation*, and *learnt*, with the Apostle, *therein to be content, how to be abased, to be hungry, and suffer need*; hast

§ Psal. xvii. 14.

thou

thou *studied to be quiet, to do thy own business, labour with thy own hands, according to the command, and work out thy salvation with a becoming diligence and fear?* Be then of good cheer. Servitude and poverty are no bar to thy acceptance with God. He hath *provided some better thing for thee* hereafter, will make thee partaker of the inheritance of his children, and in the future life advance thee to riches and honours incorruptible and eternal. Hast thou exercised a becoming *submission* to the providence of God, under various afflictions of life, and been careful to improve the greater or lesser trials of thy faith and patience, to thy growing in grace, and increasing meetness for the happiness of a better world? Then mayst thou say with pleasure: *God hath dealt with me as with his children. He hath chastened me for my profit, that I might bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and my afflictions are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall hereafter be revealed, and is reserved in heaven for me.* Hath the providential *diminution* of thy worldly substance *disengaged* thy affections more from earthly objects, and caused thee to *set them* with greater earnestness on *those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God?* Thy losses are thus far thy real gain, and thou hast great reason cheerfully to conclude that God is preparing thee for the possession of that *more enduring substance, which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.* Hast thou *survived* thy nearest and dearest re-
latives

latives and friends, been parted from thy beloved companion, whom thou hadst chosen for life, been bereaved of thy children, or lost those whose bounty was in a great measure thy support? And hast thou been enabled to bring thyself into an humble resignation to the will of God? Hope then in him. He is thy sure, thy best friend, the possessor of eternity, who will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. With him, Christian, thou mayst every day have sweet communion and converse, and he ever lives to supply all thy need, according to the riches of his glory by Jesus Christ. Hath thy soul been distressed, and thy life imbitter'd, by grievous suggestions of mind, and repeated temptations to sins, which thine heart abhorreth, and which thou darest being chargeable with the guilt of? Bear them yet a little longer with patience and fortitude. To be tempted is not thy sin, nor any the least argument of a divine desertion. The Son of God himself suffered being tempted, and from thence learnt compassion, and how more effectually to succour them that are tempted. Take refuge therefore in his compassion, whose grace is sufficient for thee, and encourage thyself in that language of the Psalmist: *Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.**

This chearful hope in God is not only a matter of privilege, but of certain and un-

* Psal. xlii. 11.

questionable *duty*, a disposition that the consideration of God's infinitely kind and benevolent character leads us to exercise and cherish. It more peculiarly becomes us, as we enjoy the benefit of divine *revelation* †, and 'tis one great intention of the scriptures, that *by the patience and comfort* which they inspire *we may have hope* †. To abide with God gives the Christian a solid right to take the comfort of it. 'Tis expressly commanded, *Be sober and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ* ||. 'Tis one of the capital graces in the Christian character, and one of the principal parts of the Christian armour; since we are commanded to *put on for an helmet the hope of salvation* §. Nay 'tis of so great importance in Christianity, as that we are expressly said to *be saved by it* *; inasmuch as our perseverance and steadfastness in our Christian profession, and our chearful obedience to the great precepts of religion, in a great measure depend on our embracing this hope, and cherishing the influence of it perpetually in our breasts. 'Tis highly honourable to religion, and tends to recommend the principles and duties of it to others, who will be naturally led to approve it, when they see us *abound in hope*, and that its genuine fruits are *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost* †. And this is what we should every day pray for, that *our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father,*

† Rom. xv. 4.

† Ibid viii. 15, &c.

|| 1 Pet. i. 13.

§ 1 Theff. v. 8.

* Rom. viii. 24.

† 2 Theff. ii. 16.

who hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, would comfort our hearts, and establish us in every good word and work †. But lastly,

9. Whatever be our condition in life, let us *abide therein with God*, by *exercising* that *humility* which becomes our circumstances; *ascribing* all that is good in us to his *grace* and *favour*, and placing our *dependence* for final acceptance on *his mercy in Christ*; as knowing that this is his fixed constitution to render us partakers of eternal salvation and blessedness. This also is a thought to which the Apostle plainly leads us; for he ascribes our being free in the Lord, and becoming the servants of Christ, to his *call*, and puts the believing servants in mind: *Ye are bought with a price* ‡; plainly intimating that all their privileges and hopes as Christians, were owing to their being purchased and redeemed by the blood of Christ. True piety teaches us to *acknowledge God in all our ways*, and regard him as the *author and giver of every blessing pertaining to life and godliness*.

We are directed by our blessed Lord to pray to our heavenly Father *for our daily bread*; and the only reason that can vindicate the necessity or wisdom of such a prayer is, that the *same good providence* of God that constantly, and not in extraordinary cases only, provides for, and *feeds the fowls of the air, and clothes the lilies and grass of the field*, doth also

† 2 Thess. ii. 17.

‡ Ver. 23.

as constantly concern itself in providing for the necessities of mankind. And the same principles that lead us to *ask* of God our daily bread, will also lead us to *bleſs* him for the continual supply of it. Nor will this ever deserve the name of superstition, whilst providence is owned to be a reality, and not a name only without sense or meaning to it. As to the great concerns of *religion* and *godliness*, men have as immediate and strict a connection with God, as they have in those relating to the *present life*, and the preservation and comfortable support of it; and they have as little reason to expect any continued prosperity in the former, without the continued influence of his grace and favour, as they have in the latter, if destitute of the care and blessing of his providence. The whole strain of divine revelation confirms us in this sentiment.

Innumerable passages might be cited, that plainly teach us our dependence upon God, in the great affair of a religious and virtuous life, and the securing our final salvation and happiness. Nor will any sensible Christian be at all apprehensive, that by this doctrine he degrades his reasonable powers and faculties, renders his own care to improve and rightly exercise them unnecessary, or destroys the liberty and freedom of human actions. For he well knows, that whatever the reasonable powers of men may be sufficient for, they are not so perfect and all-sufficient, as to render them independent of God, or make all divine

influence and assistance entirely unnecessary. Nor doth he ever expect those divine influences, which the gospel encourages him to hope for, to supply any defect of wilful and habitual negligence and carelessness in himself, but to corroborate and aid his own rational powers, to add vigour and spirit to his active faculties, to relieve them under their imperfections, and support him, in the use of all proper means, under the disadvantages of his present imperfect state, and the difficulties and temptations with which the discharge of his duty may be attended. And therefore he cannot conceive, how this concurrence of the assistance and grace of God, can be any the least infringement of the liberty of human actions, or his freedom in a religious and virtuous life. Yea he conceives it as one principal method, by which he recovers the liberty of a reasonable being, and becomes able for, and voluntary and willing in the discharge of his proper duty. For as the habits of sin, and the prevalence of sensual appetites and passions, are the great things that destroy human liberty, and so bind and fetter the rational powers, as that they cannot freely and vigorously exert themselves; so if these habits are cured, and the power of sense and appetite is so broken, as that the mind recovers its disposition and ability, *i. e.* its freedom, for that which is good; whether we gain this freedom by the precepts and motives of the gospel, or by real impressions and influences from God, or which is the truth of the case,

by the favour and grace of God, concurring with the external advantages we enjoy by the gospel revelation, the liberty of human actions is no more infringed by the one method than the other, but in truth owes its very being to the causes of its restoration; it being surely no more unintelligible or absurd for the Christian to say, that he owes his liberty to the favour of God, and his blessing on the gospel revelation, than it is for him to say, that he owes it to the assistance of the gospel revelation without that blessing.

Abide therefore, Christian, with God, by giving him the glory that is due to him, the glory of all that is good in thee, and of all the good that is done by thee; and arrogate not more to thyself, than is due to the imperfection of thy nature, and the infirmities attending thy present condition. Hast thou a competent *knowledge* of the great truths of religion? Pride not thyself in the valuable attainment, but own with thankfulness the goodness of God, *who hath filled thee with the knowledge of his will, in all that wisdom and spiritual understanding* * thou art possessed of. Is thy *faith* in the revelation and promises of the gospel a radicated confirmed principle, a vital active efficacious one? Remember that *faith* as well as *love* is *from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* †. Is thy heart warmed with a prevailing *affection* and *love* to God? Say it then with gratitude: *It is the Lord who hath*

* Col. i. 9.

† Eph. vi. 23.

directed my heart into this love of God, and that I love him, because he first loved me *. Hast thou put on bowels of mercy, meekness, long-suffering, and that charity which is the bond of perfectness? Own thy obligations to him, who hath made thee to increase and abound in love towards the saints, and towards all men, to the end he may establish thy heart unblameable in holiness before God even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints †. Is thy patience firm, and equal to thy trials and afflictions in life? Is it not God who hath strengthened thee with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering ‡? Art thou resigned to the will of providence, and in whatsoever state thou art therewith content? Oh, happy attainment! But shouldest thou not with the Apostle say: I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me §. Hast thou maintained thy constancy under temptations, and approved thy fidelity to God, under the several trials of it, with which thou hast been exercised? Oh, how becoming is that language in one thus highly favoured and honoured! God is faithful, who hath not suffered me to be tempted above my ability, but hath with the temptation also made a way for my escape, that I have been able to bear it ¶. Art thou enabled to honour God, to adorn the doctrine of God thy Saviour, and credit thy profession, by abounding in the fruits of righteousness, and all those good works

* 2 Thess. iii. 5. † 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13. ‡ Colos. i. 11.
§ Phil. iv. 11, 12, 13. ¶ 1 Cor. x. 13.

that

that are essential to the Christian life and character? Should'st thou not look upon thyself as indebted to *the God of peace, that brought again our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead*, for having thus *made thee perfect in every good work, and wrought in thee that which is well pleasing in his sight* * ? And in consequence of all this, is thy mind at peace, thy conscience easy, are thy comforts habitual, thy hopes chearful, and all thy prospects into futurity clear and joyous? Let *thy soul and all that is within thee bless the name of God, even the God of hope, who hath filled thee with all joy and peace in believing, and caused thee to abound in hope through the power of the holy Spirit* †.

And though purity of heart, holiness of conversation, and universal obedience to the commands of God, as the genuine effects of a living, active faith; or in other words, the Christian temper and life be essentially and immutably necessary, by the reason of the thing, and the express appointment of God in the gospel revelation, to final salvation and eternal happiness; yet the understanding Christian, though he looks on these things as preparatives and dispositions for future blessedness, will not regard them as the *sole*, or *principal foundation* of his hope of, and claim to, that *glory, honour, and immortality*, that he aspires after, and is encouraged to expect by the gospel promises.

He doth *not* indeed *renounce* them, as the evidences of the reality of his *conversion*, and

* Heb. xiii. 21, 22.

† Rom. xv. 13.

the sincerity of his profession; nor disclaim them as the *effects* of the *grace of God*, and the *proofs* that he hath *not received it in vain*; nor as implying his *meekness for the inheritance of the saints in light*, and his preparation for the glory that is hereafter to be revealed; as the arguments from whence he concludes that God *hath chosen him to salvation*, and the grounds of his hope that he *shall be preserved blameless* to the final possession of it. No, he rejoiceth in what God by his word and Spirit hath done for him, and adores that goodness which hath saved him from the corruptions of life, and formed him into the divine image and nature, and hereby rendered him capable of *obtaining mercy to eternal life*; and he would be insensible of his best obligations, and ungrateful to his bountiful benefactor, should he not thankfully acknowledge it *to the glory of his grace*.

But still as a presumption of *merit*, and a *sufficient plea* for the grant of *eternal life* and blessedness, from the *original*, strict, impartial, *uncovenanted* justice of God; in this view he renounceth all that he is, and all that he can do; as well knowing, that the Christian recompense is too substantial and permanent, to be a matter of *debt* due to him; or to be expected by him, but as the *free gift* of undeserved and abundant *grace in Christ*. He indeed knows, that *God is not unrighteous to forget the work and labour of love**, which his faithful servants shew in obedience to his will, and

* Heb. vi. 10.

that *no part of their labour shall be in vain in the Lord*; and pleases himself, that by walking and abiding with God, and steadfastness in his Christian profession, he hath an humble, yet real, firm, and unalterable claim to the gospel blessedness, from the equity, fidelity and truth of God. But then he remembers, that this claim arises, not from the *intrinsic importance and worth* of the best services he can perform, or of the most perfect holiness he can boast of; but from the *voluntary assurances and engagements* of God himself *through Jesus Christ*; and when contemplating in his mind the great objects of his faith, and attentively surveying the good things that God hath laid up for them that love him, he rejoices in hope, and allows himself to form the pleasing expectation, that he himself shall inherit them; 'tis upon this sure foundation: *My God is faithful who hath promised, who also will perform it.* As to himself, his language is: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.* I have forfeited life and all the blessings of it, and have no claim from thy strict and impartial justice to the benefits included in the gospel salvation. My only refuge is in thy *mercy and promise in Christ Jesus.* Here I anchor my hope. Here I fix my foundation, and from hence only expect final and eternal redemption.

Rejoice therefore, Christian, in the hope of salvation; but found thy hope and joy upon the promises and gift of grace. Look upon

thyself as an heir of eternal glory, but as constituted such by the Father's love, and thy relation to and interest in the Redeemer. Claim the purchased possession as the effect and reward of real and substantial merit; *not thine own, but his, who always did the things that pleased God*, and by his obedience to death obtained the godlike reward of becoming the *Saviour of all that believe in him*. Urge the truth and righteousness of God, for thy receiving all thou hereafter expectest; but remember 'tis truth and righteousness founded upon voluntary promise, and that nothing can support thy plea from hence, but the free constitution and assurance of undeserved mercy and favour. If thou abidest with God by an humble dependence on his fidelity to his word, by taking refuge in his unchangeable mercies, and resting all thy best hopes on that sure and only foundation that he hath laid, in the redemption which is by Christ; thy soul will have *an anchor sure and steadfast* to support it, the ground of thy comfort can never fail thee, and when all the fond and delusive claims of pride and presumption shall wholly vanish, and be found lighter than nothing and vanity; God himself shall justify all thy expectations, allow at his own tribunal that thy plea is valid, put thee into full possession of all thy hopes, and even out-do the largest thou hast ever formed, by conferring on thee the *exceeding and eternal weight of glory*.

S E R M O N X.

The Reasonableness and Advantages of abiding with GOD.

I C O R. vii. 24,

*Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called,
therein abide with God.*

I Have largely *explained* in the foregoing discourses, what this *abiding with God*, in the respective circumstances of life in which he hath placed us, implies. And it appears from what hath been said, that 'tis a very extensive and important duty; and I shall now lay before you,

The *reasons* and *motives* that may be assigned, to engage us to pay a constant regard to this apostolick admonition; and they will be found to be such as are of the highest importance in themselves, and which deserve our most serious attention.

The duty is *highly reasonable* in itself, founded in the most certain truth, and must carry its own conviction of being necessary and fit, to all who impartially consider it, and will allow themselves to form the true and unprejudiced judgment

judgment concerning it. The being and perfections of God, universal nature speaks forth. All things must have their rise from him, and whatever they are in their original state, he formed and constituted them such. *Men* are properly *his offspring* and the creatures of his power. They have no hand in their own production, and could neither will nor effect their existence. They come into being according to those laws which he hath settled, and *when* they shall be born, *of whom*, and in what *circumstances*, is all of *his* determination and appointment. Nor are the after circumstances of men's lives absolutely without a divine superintendence and guidance, left without exception to undirected accident, or necessitated by an uncontrollable fatality, or entirely given up to the choice and management of human policy and wisdom. This is a supposition wholly groundless, incapable in its very nature of any proof, and altogether inconsistent with our best conceptions of the infinite protection of the great Father and Lord of all things.

How is it possible to conceive of him in any other view, than that of *governor* of his own creation, by such laws as are suitable to the respective natures of the various creatures that he hath formed? Are the characters of universal creator and sovereign, which necessarily and immutably belong to him, unworthy him to assume; or if he assumes them, is it beneath him to regard them? Rather if creation constitutes him *supream* and *universal*

fal Lord, doth it not become him to maintain this right, and vindicate the honours of his eternal majesty, and support the dignity of his throne and government? But can there be government without constant inspection, real superintendency of affairs, seasonable interpositions of wisdom and goodness, controuling the passions and over-ruling the actions of moral agents, suitable encouragements of the faithful and obedient, proper instances of displeasure to notorious offenders, and all other acts that become a wise and just and equitable administration.

The notion that some would have us to form of God, that he hath made the worlds, and *established* all things by certain *fixed* and *wise laws*; and that in consequence of this, he *leaves* all things to go on in a *general round*, without ever concerning himself to inspect the state of his own dominions, or regard the behaviour and circumstances of his various subjects; without interposing to correct, and provide against any inconveniencies and abuses; or troubling himself what any of his creatures do, or whether they are happy or miserable; or whether those who act under his authority, and by commission from him, abuse their trust, or act agreeable to their obligations, and employ the powers they are entrusted with according to his will. This notion of God is *mean* and *dishonourable*, and degrades him beneath the dignity of an earthly prince; who would be looked on with contempt and abhorrence, should he thus give up
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the reins of government ; and from a pretence that his laws are all just and wise, and the constitution he hath fixed perfect, and incapable of any alteration for the better, renounce the inspection of publick affairs, leave every one to do as he pleased, and suffer all the disorders, that must necessarily arise in such a state of things, to pass on without correction and redress ; especially if all these disorders came to his knowledge, and he had the full power in his own hands to punish, or restrain them, or over-rule them to the publick utility,

Every man knows, that even *human government* extends, in innumerable instances to *every individual*, provides as far as it can for their happiness, regulates their behaviour, determines the duty of their stations, inspects their conduct, redresses their grievances, corrects their irregularities, frequently encourages their merit, provides against future emergencies, improves unexpected accidents to the publick welfare, or prevents the evil consequences that may arise from them ; and, in a word, hath its eyes every where to observe every thing of consequence, to support its own majesty and honour, and to secure the various ends of private and publick utility it aims at. And can any reasonable mind imagine, that there is nothing correspondent to these things in the government of God ? Are his eyes, that *perpetually pass through the earth*, blind and insensible ? If he sees, will he not regard ? Are his *laws of government holy, wise and good*,
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and is there no inspection whether they are *violated or obeyed*? Can he controul the passions of men, over-rule their counsels, and make their actions subservient to private or publick good, without labour, pain, or difficulty; and in innumerable instances, without breaking in upon the general laws that he hath established; and hath he precluded himself from all interpositions of this kind, and made it the rule of his government that in reality he will never exercise any government at all?

It would be a much more rational scheme, wholly to reject the belief of a God, than to pretend to own his being, and deny his providence; than to acknowledge his creating all things and exclude him from the government of them; than in words to own the government, and not confess the constant activity and vigour of it; than to extend it to the *frame of nature in general*, and not to the *individuals* which constitute the whole; or than to imagine that it concerns the *material* system only, and not *rational and moral* agents. The government of intellectual beings and free agents, is a *nobler* province than that of mere matter. The laws by which material causes act, may be certain and fixed, and never need, on their own account, any variation of influence, any new direction from the original cause. But as the actions of moral and free agents are governed by a great diversity of motives and causes, by a variety of passions, appetites, designs and views; as they
aim

aim at different and even contradictory ends ; it seems in the nature of things impossible, that any one single scheme of conduct, any one constitution or plan, be it in general ever so well calculated, should yet be capable to answer all events, or suit all the emergencies that may arise in the extensive kingdom and government of God, amongst intelligent beings of such various capacities and powers, as man is possessed of, forming such a variety of schemes as his imagination may suggest, and pursuing them by such numerous methods, as to his mind may appear the most likely and effectual. And therefore whatever may be the *general* laws of the divine government, yet there is no greater absurdity in nature than to suppose, that God hath not left himself at liberty, to *interpose* by what methods soever he pleases, for the better regulation of the affairs of the world, for supporting the honour and securing the ends of his own administration, and the general welfare and particular happiness of his reasonable creatures ; whenever the general plan may be found insufficient ; not from any real imperfection in the framing it, but from the real necessity of things themselves, to answer the views, and accomplish the designs of his own wisdom and goodness.

Agreeable to these principles, it must therefore be the most reasonable part we can act, to pay a constant regard to the presence, interposition and providence of God ; and not only to consider ourselves as his creatures, but all the
various

various circumstances of our being as the allotment of his wisdom and goodness, and the dispositions and duties arising out of them, as having the sanction of his establishment and authority. To abide with him, wherein soever we are called and placed, is but paying the tribute of respect and reverence that is due to him, as the great author of life, and the sovereign disposer of all the events relating to it. If all things come to pass in virtue of that constitution which he hath fixed, or by any peculiar interpositions of his power; then also my own station in life, and all the distinguishing characters connected with it, as they are in truth a divine settlement, ought to be regarded by me as such, and continued in and submitted to out of obedience to God, and during the continuance of his pleasure; the inconveniencies of it chearfully borne, the duties arising out of it diligently performed, the several advantages of it rightly improved, the temptations peculiar to it firmly resisted, and the blessings received in it thankfully acknowledged. To acquaint myself with him, to preserve in my heart a lively sense of his presence, daily to exercise myself in all the instances of a rational piety and devotion, to honour him by a chearful hope of his acceptance, and to make his mercy the refuge of my soul under all its fears; is such a part of conduct that the most impartial reason and judgment leads me to, and convinces me is every way becoming my nature, and suitable to my condition; and must continue to be

be so, whilst I have any real dependence on, or any necessary and constant connection with him.

And as this abiding with God is a precept founded in the inmost reason and nature of things, so it is frequently inculcated by divine revelation, and enforced therein by the strongest motives. It is enjoined and recommended under a great variety of expressions; such as *walking with God, or walking before him, walking before God in truth, with all the heart and soul, walking in the fear of God, or in the sight of God, dwelling in his presence, setting the Lord always before us, fearing before God, being continually with him, living in all good conscience before God, and many other phrases of like nature and import, and conveying to us the same general sense with that of *abiding with God* in my text, viz. the maintaining a continual sense of his presence, and steadily acting under the influence of it. And this habitual sense of God upon our hearts, is indeed that one great consideration which, according to revelation, should continually possess our minds, and be attended to as the principal, comprehensive motive and spring of our conduct thro' the whole of life; from the awes of which we should never suffer our minds to be free, and to which we should have recourse for our daily establishment and perseverance.*

It is the principle by which good men, renowned in the sacred writings, as the great patterns of religion, and favourites of God, have

have been continually governed. In the most early ages of the world, 'tis recorded of *Enoch*, that *he walked with God* *. It was one of the peculiar commendations of the Jewish law-giver, that he *saw him that was invisible, and had respect unto the recompence of reward* †. It was the character of the royal Psalmist, that his *eyes were ever towards the Lord*, and that *he waited on him all the day* ‡; and it was an observation of the wisest prince that ever lived, made as the result of long experience, that *that fear of God, which produces obedience to his commands, is the whole of man* ||; in consequence of which, he gives this wise and rational advice: *In all thy ways acknowledge him: Be not wise in thine own eyes. Fear the Lord, and depart from evil* §. And with regard to the Messiah himself, when he represents his own character in prophecy, he declares: *I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved* †. And when he actually appeared as the great instructor and example of mankind, he was so influenced and wholly governed by a regard to his Father's presence and authority, as that he made it *his meat to do his will*, and *ever did the things that pleased him*. And there is nothing more evident, than that one principal intention of his whole religion, as taught by himself, and his inspired Apostles, is: To fix deeply on the hearts of men the *gawes of God*, and engage them habitually to

* Gen. v. 24.
 † Eccles. xii. 13.

† Heb. xi. 26, 27.

§ Prov. iii. 6, 7.

† Psal. xxv. 15.

† Psal. xvi. 8.

govern themselves, in all the various stations and transactions of their lives, by a serious regard to his authority and will. So that in this great and important article, the dictates of reason are confirmed by the voice of revelation; and as they evidently strengthen each other, the abiding continually with God is in itself, and ought to be considered by us, as a duty of the first importance, and attended with the most unquestionable and sacred obligation.

And indeed this is one of those intrinsick arguments and demonstrations of the divine original of the Christian doctrine, that can never be subverted, and that will weigh down many lesser objections, that the subtlety and malice of those that oppose and hate it, may at any time urge against it. For if all the great principles of religion and morality, advanced in the gospel, are agreeable to truth and reason, and if the great duties recommended in it, as essential to both, are in reality the essential duties of both; the necessary certain consequence is, that 'tis the religion of God, and that men are bound to embrace its principles, and conform to the obligations of it: And the consequence of this will further be, that the publishers and teachers of such a religion were the instruments of God's providence, raised up by his power and goodness to declare it to the world, and furnished, either by extraordinary endowments of nature, or by immediate special illuminations from the God of truth and grace, with that light of knowledge, which
were

were necessary to their becoming the instructors of mankind, and propagating a religion amongst them, every way perfect in its nature, and void of all those weaknesses, mistakes, superstitions, and follies, that betray themselves in all the various settlements of religion that have ever obtained in the world, under the direction and conduct of mere human reason and authority.

And whatever be the prejudices of our modern sages and philosophers against the miracles recorded in the sacred writings, and however unwilling they may be to admit them; yet, upon the scheme of infidelity, they shall be forced to admit as great a miracle as any of those which they deny. Since 'tis not only a real *miracle*, but a miracle of that nature, as *surpasses* all the bounds of *credibility*; that *Jesus Christ*, and his *Apostles*, destitute of all the *advantages* of birth, education, polite learning, travelling, and all the other means and sources of improvement and knowledge, *bred* up amidst the idle traditions, prejudices, and numerous superstitions of their own nation, *engaged* in the *lowest* occupations of human life; without leisure to study; of but ordinary capacities most of them, and dull of apprehension; should, notwithstanding all these disadvantages of nature and circumstances, *teach* and *publish* to the world a scheme of religion, *rational* in all its first foundations and principles; and in all the great duties arising out of them, as much *superior* to that of *their own nation* they were

bred up in, as the substance to the shadow, and the truth of things to mere ceremonies and empty appearances; and as much *nobler* than the religions of all *other* nations on the earth, as wisdom than folly, piety than idolatry, and the genuine worship of God than the absurdest and most contemptible superstition.

Yea, 'tis a most certain truth, and will be found so upon the most impartial enquiry; the gospel scheme of religion hath *not omitted* one single principle *essential* to true religion; not one single duty that belongs to it; not any one motive of importance, necessary to enforce the obligations and strengthen the practice of it: That it hath not mixed any thing *heterogeneous*, or foreign to the nature of it, or that hath not a tendency to promote the acknowledged and avowed ends of it; and that, what no other religion that ever was in the world could boast of, it is calculated, not for the benefit of any one kingdom or nation of the earth only, or principally, but equally and alike for *all* people, and forms of government, throughout the whole habitable world. On all these accounts, it will be found unspeakably preferable to every thing that hath been delivered by the most famous law-givers, sages and philosophers, that have been any where celebrated for their policy, laws, institutions, wisdom and learning; who, whatever excellent things they may have said, and many they have said, as to *morality* and *virtue*; yet with respect to *religion*,

religion, the great object, principles, duties and motives of it, are all of them extremely defective, in many essential points absolutely mistaken, and in others have recommended and endeavoured to establish the meanest absurdities, superstitions and impieties; as every one must acknowledge, who is the least conversant with the writings they have left behind them, or knows any thing of their religious principles or practices.

But here *Christianity* hath an *unrivalled* and *unsullied* glory. For as the great and ultimate object of all religion, in principle, temper, and practice, is the *one only living and true God*, it raises men to the contemplation of his being and perfections, is calculated to awaken in them the worthiest dispositions and affections towards him, teaches them that they have an immediate perpetual concern with him, are continually open to his inspection, and finally accountable at his tribunal; and engages them by the most powerful persuasives and arguments *constantly to abide with him*, to eye him in the whole of their conduct, to live with a perpetual regard to his presence and authority, to approve themselves to him by a faithful discharge of the duties of life he hath appointed them, to refer all things they do *to his glory*, and to make it the great ambition and constant aim of their whole conduct, *whether living or dying to be accepted of him*.

Let me add farther, that this *continual sense of God* upon our minds, and governing ourselves

selves by a *continual regard to his presence and inspection*, is a very *honourable and worthy* ingredient in the characters of men, and teaches them most effectually always to maintain the true dignity of them. The *highest* orders of *created* intelligences have this reverential awe of God *habitual* to them; it enters into their disposition, it is an essential part of their character, and they are never free from the sacred influence of it. And the reason is obvious, because they are conscious to the infinite distance between God and them; their dependence on his pleasure, their dwelling in the immensity of his nature, their being ever open to his inspection, the necessity of his continued favour to their happiness, and the propriety and fitness of cherishing the awes of his majesty, and governing their entire conduct by a regard to his authority and presence. And it is this propriety of disposition and conduct, that renders their character more amiable and worthy, than merely the superiority of their powers and faculties, and the high rank in which they stand amidst the creation of God. And surely there is nothing that can instamp an higher dignity and worth on any reasonable beings, than the right exercise and application of their intellectual powers, their cultivating and improving all those affections and dispositions, that are suited to their natures, their connections and obligations, and their invariably acting towards all beings, and especially towards God the greatest and best of beings, as truth and righteousness,

the reason of the thing, and a lively sense of duty direct and influence them to do.

There is nothing renders men more *contemptible*, than the *want of principle*; except it be their *contradicting* in practice the *principles* they know and profess to believe; and there is no one of common decency, that hath any remains of conscience, any sense of things venerable and sacred, but must look upon the wretch that talks profanely and contemptuously of God, denies his being, rejects his providence, renounces all fear of him, ridicules his anger, despises his favour, and treats the principles and obligations of religion, as having no foundation but in the weakness, credulity and superstition of those who regard them: I say there is no person of common understanding, and that hath any love to propriety of behaviour, real worth, and dignity of character, but must look on such a wretch with *abhorrence* and *disdain*, as a kind of monstrous production in the rational world, a deformed, unfinished, detestable figure; that shews human nature in absolute ruins, and how far 'tis possible for it to be degraded and sunk from its original worth and excellency. The moment a man becomes impious and profane, he stigmatizes and reproaches himself, and he no sooner gives up and renounces all sense of and dependence on God, but he sinks into brutality, and divests himself both of his conscience and reason. The being of God is so certain and demonstrable a truth, that nothing but *stupidity* can call it into

question; and providence is so nearly connected with his existence, as that none but a *weak* mind can pretend to acknowledge the one, and deny the other; and to hold both these principles, and yet to throw off all sense of God, to live destitute of his fear, disobedient to his will, unthankful for his mercies, regardless of his favour, and without any solicitude finally to secure his approbation and favour; argues so wretched and thoughtless a state, or such a total fixed depravity of heart, as renders such a person an object both of pity and contempt. But a *religious* character is, in its nature, an *honourable* one, and piety to God is venerable and sacred, wherever it is *uniform* and *undissembled*. Even vice itself stands in awe of it, and the worst of men will often do justice to it, own its superior worth and excellency, and sometimes secretly repine, that they are destitute of the spirit, and find themselves unable to conform to the rules of it. 'Tis what, if there be a God, he must approve, regard as the most honourable distinction amongst mankind, and finally reward with his commendation and the most durable and substantial marks of his favour.

Again, How greatly will this *continually abiding with God*, add also to the *genuine comfort* and *true enjoyment of life*? How will it *heighten* every *pleasure* we taste, and *alleviate* every circumstance and kind of *affliction* that can befall us? There is not a more joyous consideration in the whole world, to a reason-
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able rightly disposed mind, than that of the being and infinite perfection of God; that he is every where present, hath the most perfect knowledge of every person, and every event, hath all things under his perpetual care and management, and orders the lot of every individual for life and godliness, for time and eternity. A sincerely religious person knows, that though God is worthy the highest *veneration*, he is no object of *terror*, there is nothing in his character to excite aversion, or strike with dread, unless men themselves are in a state of unnatural enmity to him, and by indulging criminal affections, and the irregular pursuit of lawless and hurtful gratifications, render the thoughts of him grievous, put themselves out of his protection, and expose themselves to his displeasure. They consider him in his true character, as the *greatest* and *best* of beings, esteem him as their *father* and *friend*, as their guardian and protector, and as their *portion and exceeding great reward*. The thoughts of his *omnipresence* gives them no pain, but it is what they rejoice in, because by being never absent from God, they never can be where he cannot support and bless them. What though his *knowledge* is *universal*, and in consequence of this he is conscious to all the various errors and offences of their lives? Yet he knows also that their *repentance is sincere*, that they live in the *habitual* commission of no wilful and presumptuous sin, that they hate it in every kind and appearance of it, that they *follow after holiness*,
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and endeavour to *perfect it in his fear*; that they aim to correct their lesser faults, are ambitious of the most entire conformity to God, and that *in simplicity and godly sincerity they have their conversation in the present world*. That *infinite power*, which belongs to him, and which makes evil spirits, and bad men tremble, they rejoice in the belief of, because they know it shall be employed for *their welfare*, shall secure their safety, and enable *infinite goodness* to accomplish all its kindest purposes in their favour. What though he is *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity* with approbation, and the rectitude of his nature is without the least blemish or stain; yet 'tis their satisfaction, that he is the *righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness* wherever he discerns it, and *whose countenance beholds the upright* with approbation; and because 'tis their ambition to resemble him, and their constant endeavour to perfect holiness under the influence of his fear, they take pleasure in seeing themselves formed into his image, and growing into higher degrees of conformity to him; assuring themselves from his love of holiness, that he will encourage and assist them in their endeavours to *be partakers of a divine nature*, and finally bring them to that happier world, where they shall be *perfect as their Father who is in heaven is perfect*. Even the prospect of a *future judgment*, in which they must *give an account of themselves to God*, though it be an event that can never be thought of, without impressing the mind with an *holy awe*, yet
awakens

awakens many a *pleasing* and *cheerful reflection*, and they regard it as that blessed season, when their *integrity* shall be made *manifest*, when their faith shall appear to have been a vital active principle, when God shall commend them for their habitual obedience and submission to his will, when he shall acknowledge them for *good and faithful servants*, solemnly acquit them from condemnation and death, and finally adjudge them to that *recompence of reward*, of which his own goodness and mercy had received them to the hope by the promise and mediation of Jesus Christ. All those sacred affections, which they terminate on God, and of which they live in the habitual exercise, their reverence, esteem, affection for him, their trust in and dependence on him, their resignation and submission to him, their desire to please him, and ambition to be accepted of him, are all of them *sources of joy*, and yield them the most grateful possession of themselves. Every virtue they practise, all the good works they abound in, and the several duties of life they are careful to perform, out of obedience to his will, and with a view to acquit themselves faithful in his service, give them the most *comfortable review*, and strengthen the foundations of their inward security and peace. Whatever their condition in life is, the thought that 'tis of God's orderance, and the assurance that 'tis therefore well and wisely ordered, reconciles them to, and makes them *cheerful and contented* in it. If they have
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prosperity, they have no anxiety about the continuance of it, because they know he that gave it can secure it; and as they enjoy it with gratitude, because it is the effect of his friendship and care, and look on it as an earnest of more valuable and durable blessings yet to come, it gives a double relish to every instance of it, and makes the happiness arising from it peculiarly satisfying. If they are exercised with afflictions, the consideration that God appoints them, that he intends their good by them, *to take away their sin, and make them partakers of his holiness*, that he can remove them, and will support them under them, and that they shall finally *work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, takes away in great measure the bitterness of affliction, helps to reconcile them to, and make them contented with their lot, and enables them with gratitude and pleasure to acknowledge, that in goodness and *very faithfulness God hath afflicted them*. In the management of their worldly concerns they go on with cheerfulness, looking to God to prosper the work of their hands, and exercising the sincerest gratitude to him for every instance of success they meet with. Their desire to approve themselves to him, in every relation of life they are placed in, renders them careful to discharge the duties that arise out of them, and thereby secures that mutual enjoyment and happiness, they were originally intended to produce. Committing every day all their concerns to God, they cheerfully expect his

his protection and blessing, and knowing that he is the great disposer and lord of life, they are in no bondage through the fear of death, are easy amidst the daily dangers that encompass them, know that no destructive arrow shall wound them without his permission, thankfully enjoy the comforts that every day brings with it, and every returning evening lie down in peace and composure, sleep without terror, and render the revisiting light of morning more welcome and joyous by the pleasing sacrifice of grateful thanksgiving to him, who causes them *to dwell in safety*. A truly religious person thus introduces God into every occurrence and scene of life, and makes himself happy in the firm belief of his perpetual providence and universal inspection, in the habitual sense of his favour, and the glorious assurance he hath, that all the paths of God towards him shall be mercy and truth, and every thing made finally to work together for his good. Once more,

This *abiding with God* in all the various circumstances of our being greatly tends to the *preservation and safety of life*, and is a sure protection from all the worst evils that can possibly befall us. When men proceed to such a degree of insensibility and wickedness, as that they utterly divest themselves of the awe of God, and exclude him from all their thoughts; what have they left to guide them through all the various snares and hazards of the present state? Real principles

ciples they can have none. The best dispositions they are wholly destitute of. The care of providence they have little reason to expect. Of what then have they resigned themselves to the influence and power. The *blind* instinct of their appetites and passions, the examples and manners of the *corrupt* and *profligate*, the solicitations of insinuating companions and pretended friends, who have a spiteful pleasure in perverting and ruining others; and if there be such a thing, and surely daily experience too sadly convinces us there is, the solicitations of *evil spirits*, who, by the dispositions of men's evil hearts, tempt and seduce them into the paths of impurity, guilt and ruin. How dreadful, how fatal is such an influence! Who, that is wise, would not wish rather to cease to live, than to be under the power of such a direction, and led on blindly by the conduct of such delusive and impious guides! In such circumstances, how is it possible for any person to escape the greatest calamities of human life? And frequently we see it true in fact, that they who live *without God*, live without taking the proper care of their own real interest; and when they become impious towards him, grow unjust and cruel to *themselves*; falling into a thousand errors of conduct, to the loss of their reputation, the neglect of their temporal affairs, the injuring their families, the impairing their constitution, and dying before they have *lived out half their days*. Whereas *abiding with God*, through the whole of life,

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naturally renders men *cautious and prudent*, provident for their welfare in time and eternity, and awakens them to *industry* in their temporal concerns, as well as in working out their everlasting salvation. It makes them watch over their passions, to prevent their being ensnared and surprized by them into any actions inconsistent with their obligations, or injurious to themselves. It is the most effectual guard against the power and influence of temptation, as it excites the fear of offending, and braces all the active faculties of the mind; inspires it with firmness and resolution, and renders it abundantly superior to every inducement, to draw them from the duty they owe to him, or sink the regard they ought ever to manifest for promoting their present and future happiness. It is a never failing security against those presumptuous follies and crimes, which are the grand causes of the principal miseries and destructions, to which unprincipled and profligate sinners every day expose themselves, tends to preserve life whilst it is worth keeping, and to render it useful and comfortable while it lasts. *In the way to which this directs there is life, and in the path way thereof there is no death.* It leads to certain immortality. And finally, as every wise man would be as happy as he can be in the present state,

So it is an extremely desirable circumstance *to die well*; with resolution and firmness of mind, with peace and satisfaction, with a good hope and prospect into futurity, and such a

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reasonable trust and confidence in God, as may do honour to the principles we have embraced, and be a justification of our foregoing character and conduct. There have been instances of the boldest *heroes in infidelity and vice*, who have laughed at the fears of God as superstition, treated his authority with great insolence, and dared him by the most profane and impious speeches, who have yet made a most *contemptible and wretched figure*, when they have come to the near prospect and approach of *death*. Then they lose all their courage, their minds are full of the deepest anxiety, and they have eternal terrors before them, that torment their imaginations, and make them dread to pass into that future state, they once ridiculed as groundless and imaginary. They now more than suspect, that there may be a God, and that they may be accountable, and themselves very likely to be damned for their past insolence and impiety. Now they think there may be something even in prayer to God Almighty, and instead of blaspheming him they are all supplication to him, and if he will but spare them a little longer, oh how good they will be, and what a wonderful reformation in them God and man shall see! They now confess themselves to be, what every body but themselves knew them to be before, egregious fools; and own those to be the only wise persons, whom not long ago they censured and laughed at as absurd bigots, and visionary enthusiasts; wishing they had embraced their principles,

principles, and been careful to have lived lives accordingly. And indeed, the great principles of religion carry with them such an abundant evidence and conviction of their truth, as that, though when the mind is dissipated by pleasure, and can't enter into any serious consideration, they may appear precarious, and of little importance; yet reflection no sooner returns, and the prejudices of corrupt affections wear off, but the reality of them is immediately apprehended, and they are clearly discerned in all the striking consequences that attend them. At such a season, no wonder that infidelity should fill men with terror, impiety should not dare to hold up her head, and habitual vice should be seen and detested as the most complicated and destructive evil; or that men should be afraid to die, when they have been all their lives long acting in such a manner, as if there was nothing to take place after death, and in defiance of that God, whose favour alone can secure them the happiness of the life that is to come.

Whereas he, who continually *abides with God*, in every situation of life in which providence places him, and under the influence of his fear and love, of faith and hope in him, carefully endeavours to maintain a *conscience void of offence towards God and man*, can have none of these terrors to make his death-bed uneasy, and disturb his rest in the nearest prospect of eternity. Are there any past errors of life, to which he is then conscious? The *sincerity of his repentance towards God*, and *faith*

in the Lord Jesus Christ assure him of mercy in the forgiveness of his sins, and as a penitent offender he knows from the constitution of the covenant of grace, that he is a pardoned and accepted one. And as he hath been enabled to act with integrity through the whole of life, and to discharge the great duties which the peculiar relations he hath been placed in have rendered necessary and becoming, he rejoiceth that God hath enabled him to be faithful, and takes the benefit and consolation of those promises in Christ, that are connected with steadiness and perseverance in well doing; and though he knows there is no proportion between the best services he can perform, and the recompence promised in the gospel, yet he is secure, on the Christian scheme, in the mediation of Christ, and the eternal and unchangeable purpose of God, to give eternal life to all without exception, who believe and obey the gospel of his Son. And here is the peculiar advantage of living under a perpetual sense of God, and governing ourselves by the influence of the Christian faith, that no man ever repents it, when he comes to the close of life. The prospect of death never makes him wish he had been an infidel or a profligate, nor does the approach of eternity excite any kind of uneasiness and terror, that he hath been a believer in Christ, and formed his conduct by the example of his Saviour, and the sacred rules of piety and virtue. No, these reflections make his pillow easy, his pains tolerable, his decays of nature chearful, his gradual ap-

proach to death delightful, and his entrance into the future world joyful and triumphant. He feels that the provisions of the gospel grace prevent all inward anguish of mind, and being *made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*, he looks upon *death* only as his entrance into possession, and on *eternity* as the *duration of his blessedness*. Thus to live with God is the way, and the only way, to die in his peace; and without thus living, comfort in death is false and groundless, and the hope of salvation vain and delusive. The testimony of a good conscience will always inspire with resolution and firmness, and without it neither the promises of God, nor the merits of Christ, can be any foundation for supporting the hope of eternal blessedness. But *if our consciences condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God*; even this confidence, that *neither life nor death, nor any creature shall be able to separate us from his love*; but that as we have had *our fruits unto holiness, the end shall be everlasting life*.

S E R M O N XI.

On St. Paul's Reasoning with *Felix*
of Righteousness, &c.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled; and answered: Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.

THESE words relate to the Apostle Paul, who being apprehended by the Jews was accused before *Felix*, the Roman governor, as a pestilent fellow, a mover of sedition amongst the Jews, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes *. This charge St. Paul in his defence absolutely denies, and fully refutes; affirming they could not prove the things whereof they accused him †. He owns indeed, that after the manner they called heresy, he so worshipped the God of his fathers, i. e. He was by profession and principle a Christian, if that was to be a sectarian and heretick; and lets them know

* Ver. 5.

† Ver. 13.

that if the doctrine he believed, and the religion he preached was *heresy*, it was an *heresy taught by the law and the prophets*, in which they themselves professed to believe. *This I confess to thee, that after the manner they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets, and have hope towards God, which they themselves allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust* *. And if this belief rendered him an heretick, they themselves, upon their own principles, must be involved in the same crime of heresy, and therefore ought not in decency to have accused him, of what they were equally chargeable with themselves. He adds: That so far was he from endeavouring to move *sedition* amongst the *Jews*, or any other persons whatsoever, that his belief of a future resurrection caused him *herein to exercise himself, to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man*. After this he challenges his accusers to prove the contrary.

Felix, upon this defence of the Apostle, deferred the further hearing of the cause to another opportunity; allowing *St. Paul* in the mean while his liberty, and ordering his keeper to forbid none of his acquaintance to visit and assist him. Some days after this, he came with his wife *Drusilla*, a *Jewess*, and sending for the Apostle, commanded him to give him some account concerning his faith in

* Ver. 14, 15.

Christ, which we are informed in my text the Apostle did, and what the immediate consequences of it were. *As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*, Felix trembled, and answered; *Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.* In speaking to which words, I shall,

I. Make some remarks on this great Apostle's conduct, before Felix the Roman governor. And

II. Draw some observations from this part of sacred history, of an instructive and practical nature.

I. I am to make some remarks on St. Paul's conduct before Felix, the Roman governor. And there are several things worthy to be taken notice of. And

1. We may consider what the subjects were, on which St. Paul insisted before Felix. He sent for the Apostle to hear him, concerning the faith in Christ; and in consequence of it he preached concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come; topics of importance, comprehensive both of principle and duty.

He reasoned of righteousness; that great branch of moral virtue, which comprehends in it almost all the duties of social life; and implies that universal and constant regard to the rights and just claims of others, and to all those sacred rules of justice and equity, in men's transactions with each other, which are of universal and immutable obligation, and ought to take place amongst all ranks and conditions of men. Of this

this *righteousness* be *reasoned*; not against it, not to depreciate the worth and value of it, not to persuade *Felix*, that 'twas a low attainment, and of little importance in the scheme of Christianity; But he reasoned *in favour of it*; and had we heard him pleading for it, I doubt not but we should have heard him explaining the several branches of it, recommending it from the *reason of the thing*, and the *universal consent* of nations; and enforcing it from its *necessity* to the *peace of societies*, and the *welfare of individuals*; from the *authority of God*, and express *doctrine and command* of the *Christian revelation*.

He reasoned also farther of *temperance*. The word properly signifies that *power* which a man hath *over himself*, to refrain from luxury and drunkenness, and curb his propensities to criminal and vagrant lusts. And how could the Apostle reason with any propriety and force concerning it, otherwise than by representing it as *amiable* in its practice, conducive to the *health* of men's bodies, *honourable* in its nature, necessary to men's *usefulness* in their stations, the maintaining a due *vigour* and *free exercise* of their *reasonable* faculties; their supporting the dignity of their respective characters, and their acquitting themselves, so as to secure the approbation of God, and of the wisest and best part of mankind. And as *Felix* was one of the chief magistrates of the *Romans*, I imagine our Apostle scarce omitted or forgot to insinuate, how essential the practice of both these virtues were, to support the *ho-*

nour, and answer the ends of magistracy and government.

And after he had reasoned on those subjects, with what could he better conclude such a train of reasoning, than by enforcing all with the doctrine of a *future judgment*, and assuring the *Roman* governor, that *high and low, rich and poor*; all ranks and degrees of men, were accountable for their present conduct before the *judgment-seat of Jesus Christ*, whom God had appointed to preside over this great solemnity, of which God had given the world this assurance, that he had raised him from the dead. These were the subjects on which the Apostle insisted, when *Felix* heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And

2. We may observe the great *prudence* of the Apostle in the choice he made of these articles, in his apology for Christianity before *Felix*. He was a person of a very *infamous* and *profligate* character. His marriage with *Dru-silla* was an act of *adultery*, as he had wickedly inticed her from her former husband. His whole government in *Judea* was a constant scene of *oppression, robbery* and *murder*; inso-much that *Tacitus* the *Roman* annalist informs us *, “ That he exercised the royal power in every act of cruelty and lust, with a base and servile disposition.” Even in the case of *St. Paul*, the sacred historian informs us, he hoped that money would have been given him, that he might have loosed him; paying no regard

* Annal. 12.

to his innocence, and the justice of his cause. And such a sense of his *oppressive* government the *Jews* themselves had, that after he was recalled they accused him at *Rome*, where he would have received his just punishment, had it not been for the intercession of the emperor's favourite, whom he probably bribed with some of the spoils of his province to save his life. Now on what subjects could the Apostle have so pertinently insisted, before a man of this character, and the governor of his nation, as those of *righteousness, temperance, and a future judgment*? For could he hereby have awakened him to repentance, he would have done the greatest kindness to *Felix* himself, and at the same time saved his country from farther oppression; as the reformation of the governor must immediately have tended to the people's happiness. So that in this instance he acted worthy his character, as a messenger of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, in attempting to reform a very bad man; and as one who was a *real patriot*, and had a generous regard for the happiness of his nation, by endeavouring to rescue it from the farther oppression of a rapacious and tyrannical governor. And though he failed as to success, yet 'twas impossible he could have urged a more powerful motive to enforce and impress what he delivered, than by putting *Felix* in mind, that tho' himself a judge, he was subject to a much *higher tribunal*, before which he was accountable for all his actions, and should receive the recompence of reward that was due to them.

3. We may farther observe the *genteel* and *polite* manner in which St. Paul reproved this *Roman* governor for his crimes. Though he was a man of an extremely profligate character, and his administration very arbitrary and cruel; yet St. Paul doth not appear to have once *named* any of the notorious vices he was guilty of. He did not point out the odious nature of lust, adultery and drunkenness. He did not tax and reproach him for the insolence and tyranny of his government, nor insult him by the mention of his cruel exactions, to gratify his avarice. This would have been too plain dealing, and scarce decent in a prisoner standing before the tribunal of his judge; and could probably have had no other effect, than to have exasperated him against the Apostle, and render'd him more averse to the faith of Christ. St. Paul knew mankind, and his own place too well, to be guilty of such a conduct; and took a method much more delicate and humane, and yet altogether as effectual in its nature. To show the *odiousness of vice*, he *reasons upon* and represents to him the *obligations* and *amiableness of virtue*. To bring to his mind the unrighteous oppressions of his government, he discourses on righteousness. To touch his conscience with the remembrance of his lewdness and criminal excesses, he *reasons* before him of *temperance*; and to bring him to repentance for all his sins, and reform him, if possible, from the crimes he had been guilty of, he puts him in mind of a *future judgment*, before the impartial tribunal

bunal of Jesus Christ, where there should be no perversion of justice, nor any escape for the highest and more powerful offenders amongst mankind from the condemnation and punishments due to them: A method this, which argued the greatest *faithfulness* and *prudence* in the Apostle; his faithfulness, in daring to reprove his judge; and his great prudence, in the soft and insinuating manner in which he did it. But

4. We may farther take notice, that our Apostle, in the tacit reproof he gave *Felix*, did not act a *bold, presumptuous, intruding part*, rashly thrusting himself into his presence, unseasonably, and without a proper allowance and call to do it; but in consequence of *Felix's* desire, and in obedience to his command; who wanted to hear him concerning the faith in Christ. *Princes and governors*, and persons in high stations of life, are to be treated with the *deference and respect* due to their superior rank and character; and the office of an Apostle and minister of Christ, gives no licence to rudeness and ill manners, or to break thro' any of the common and established rules of decency and good behaviour, out of a pretended zeal to preach the faith of Christ, to reprove great, but bad men for their crimes, and make them converts to Christianity. A zeal that pushes men to these extravagances is imprudent and rash, and cannot, in the ordinary course of things, be attended with any good effects, either to such persons themselves, or to the cause of truth and righteousness,
which

which they are desirous to maintain. And it may be remarked of *all the Apostles*, that whenever they preached to the priests and rulers of their own nation, or to any persons of rank, distinction, and authority of others, they did not, like *mad enthusiasts*, go before they were called for, but *humbly obeyed* the order of their superiors, *waited* their conveniency, *defended* their cause when *interrogated* by them concerning it, and *preached* the religion of Christ to them, when they *desired* or *commanded* it; as knowing that providence would point out to them the favourable opportunity both for spreading the knowledge of Christianity, and vindicating the cause of it before the princes of mankind *. Thus when the Apostles preached Christ before the High Priests, Rulers, Elders and Scribes, they were first *brought before them*, and *examined* by what power and name they acted. Peter did not preach to *Cornelius* †, till he was *sent for by him*, and *desired* to tell him and his friends what were the things God had commanded him to declare ‡. Thus *Sergius Paulus*, the deputy of *Paphos*, called for *Barnabas and Paul*, and *desired* to hear the word of God. 'Twas at the command of *Felix* § that St. Paul reasoned before him concerning the faith of Christ; and he was permitted by *Festus* and king *Agrippa* and *Bernice* his queen ||, to speak for himself, and vindicate his religion; before he declared how he became a convert

* Acts iv. 7. † x. 33. ‡ xiii. 7. § xxiv. 24.
|| xxvi. 1, 22, 23.

to Christianity, and preached only what had been foretold by *Moses* and the *Prophets*; viz. the sufferings and resurrection of the Messiah. He had no divine commission to be impertinent and troublesome, knew what was due to rank and character, and never was wanting in the deference he owed to his superiors. I would once more observe,

5. That this account, which the Apostle gave concerning the faith in Christ, was wisely *calculated to vindicate himself* from the accusations of his enemies before *Felix*, and the *religion of Christ*, as excellent in its nature, and in its principles and precepts highly conducive to promote the *peace and happiness* of mankind. The *charge* brought against him by *Tertullus*, the pleader, in behalf of the *Jews* was *, that he was a *pestilent fellow*, and a *mover of sedition amongst all the Jews throughout the world*, and a *ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes*. But how could he be so pernicious and execrable a wretch, who lived under the *arcs of a future judgment*, and preached, wherever he went, the necessity and obligations of *temperance and righteousness*? Are these virtues of a pestilential quality, or do they in the least tend to destroy the happiness of nations or individuals? Or do the preachers of them deserve to be treated as the enemies and curses of mankind? Without these virtues human societies cannot subsist, nor the peace and good order of the world be secured; and

* Acts xxiv. 5.

therefore

therefore the inculcating them, and pressing men, by the most powerful motives, to an habitual observance of them, can never be reasonably censured as a *sedition* practice, nor have the least influence to disturb government, or create any disorders and confusions amongst the subjects of it. 'Tis true, that the preachers of the best religion, and the most excellent doctrines and precepts, may be accidentally the *occasions* of exciting great commotions and tumults in the world. But then this is not owing to the *spirit* of what they preach, nor to any thing really criminal in their characters, as preachers. Such persons unquestionably act a very friendly and benevolent part, and deserve esteem for the service they engage in. The seditions and disorders arising from hence are occasioned by the *ignorance* and *prejudices* of weak and mistaken *bigots*, who can't bear the least opposition to their errors, and hate those who would reclaim and recover them to wiser and better sentiments; or by the *immoralities* and *vices* of *bad men*, who can't endure principles that reprove them for their crimes, nor those who expose the heinous nature, and shew the destructive consequences of them; or by the *fraud* and *craft* of *lucrative* and *self-interested men*, who make their gains, and support their authority and grandeur by the superstitions, impieties, and wickedness of those whom they deceive and impose on; or by the *pride* and *mistaken* apprehensions of *princes* and *rulers*, who assume an authority over the sciences

sciences of men, think they have a right to prescribe to their subjects what religion they shall profess, and look with jealousy and ill-will upon those, who preach and propagate any religious principles and practices different from what they have established; and are easily excited to treat them with the greatest severity, and use all the methods of iniquity and violence to silence and destroy them. To these causes are to be ascribed the animosities and disturbances that have been occasioned in the world by the religion of Christ, and the persecutions and cruelties to which the innocent and worthy preachers of it have been so often exposed. Whilst they confine themselves to their duty, preach the doctrines of the gospel, enforce by them that perfect and sublime morality, which their great Master and his Apostles have commanded them to teach; the charge of their being *movers of sedition* will be falsely and unrighteously thrown on them, and as undeserved and as absurd, as that the preaching righteousness can tend to promote injustice, inculcating temperance can encourage lewdness and drunkenness, or the recommending peace and benevolence can be the means of exciting men to tumults and rebellions. 'Twas by this prudent account of the faith of Christ, which he preached, that it enjoined righteousness and temperance, from the consideration of a judgment to come, that St. Paul defended himself from the charges brought against him before the Roman governor. And we may further observe,

That

That it was also a wise and excellent *vindication of the religion of his great Lord and master*. The honour of this was now nearly concerned, and if at such a solemn audience before a *Roman* tribunal, it could have been fairly proved, that he had been himself a raiser of sedition, or that the doctrine he taught had been of a seditious nature, and tended to raise animosities and disturbances amongst others, he had deserved the severest punishments, and his religion would have been justly censured and condemned, in the most public manner, as a *pestilent and destructive superstition*. Civil government hath a right, and in order to answer the salutary end of its institution, is obliged carefully to maintain the public welfare against all kind of attempts to interrupt and disturb it; and 'tis not the pretence to a divine mission and authority that will oblige the magistrate, quietly to permit an enterprizing person to sow the principles and spirit of sedition amongst those whom, by his duty, he is bound to preserve in peace; and he may with great reason reply to such pretence, that a commission to unhinge government, to exempt men from the obedience due to it, and to introduce confusion and disorders into societies, can never be divine; because it carries a direct opposition to the intentions of the moral providence of God, whose institution and appointment government certainly is, and whose will therefore it must be, that all ranks and degrees of men should pay the due and necessary

cessary submission to it. And therefore all who by criminal and seditious practices are found to disturb it, or who propagate such principles, which necessarily tend to shake or subvert the foundations of civil government, and by their natural and apparent influence to frustrate the great ends of it, are liable to the censure and restraint of the magistrate, and to be punished as evil doers, without any regard to the pretensions of their acting by a divine authority, or doing that by a commission from God, which the magistrate hath certainly a commission from God to prohibit or punish.

But herein the doctrine of Christ stands free from every possible imputation, and there is not a single principle or precept of his religion, that hath any the least tendency to absolve subjects from their allegiance to their princes, to inspire them with disregard to, and contempt of those wise and salutary laws, without which no societies can subsist, nor social happiness be preserved; or to excite and encourage any thing in disposition and temper, that is unfavourable to the tranquillity, order, honour, and real interests of particular persons; or any of the lesser or larger communities of mankind, that are formed for mutual security and happiness. On the contrary, the *faith* of *Christ* is of the most benign, friendly, salutary nature; it inspires *public spirit*, and cherishes it and enlarges it; it inculcates *benevolence*, and the warmest and most affectionate charity and goodness; it

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teaches every one to make every one's comfort and happiness his care and endeavour, as far as his influence reaches, and to *follow peace with all men* by all those methods which are within our power, and in their nature necessary to establish and perpetuate it. And when our Apostle was interrogated concerning the faith in Christ, under the capital charge of being a mover of sedition among all the *Jews* throughout the world, his vindication of himself and his blessed Master was ready, and such as was sufficient to put to shame and silence his malicious accusers; and he could tell them, that the faith in Christ which he preached was *righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come*; or the practice of that justice, which consists in *rendering to all their due*, and a strict observance of all those rules of temperance, which effectually teach men to restrain their sensual inclinations, and keep their passions under the most perfect government; from a firm belief of their being hereafter accountable at the tribunal of Christ, and under the awes of their receiving according to their present actions, whether good or evil. Such a religion could never be injurious to the welfare of society, nor the preachers of it ever deserve, on this account, the invidious charge of pestilent fellows, and movers of sedition. And though the enemies of Christianity have endeavoured to throw this infamy on those who have professed to believe it, and on the very principles they have embraced; yet the imputation is groundless

ess in its nature, and owing only to the suspicion of jealous ignorance, or the impudent slander of inveterate malice. Could such an insinuation have been supported in the beginning of Christianity, it must have sunk in its infancy under such an insupportable weight; but the more it was examined, and the severer the scrutiny that was made into it, its innocence and purity, its benevolent and peaceable spirit appeared with clearer evidence, and stronger conviction; insomuch that when *Pliny* †, the *Roman* proconsul, had examined several, who had been Christians, but through fear of sufferings had renounced their profession, and been prevailed with to curse and blaspheme their Saviour; he confesses that all they acknowledged was, “that this was the utmost
“of their fault or error, that on a stated day
“they used to meet before day break, and
“sing an hymn in honour of Christ, as to a
“God, and to bind themselves by a sacrament or oath, not to the commission of
“any crime, but that they never would
“steal, or rob, or commit adultery, or break
“their promise, nor withhold a deposit,
“when demanded by those from whom they
“had received it.” And that he might get the truest and fullest information in this matter, he cruelly put to the torture two poor girls, who were servants or *deaconesses* in some Christian congregation; from whom he could extort nothing by the rack, but

† Epist. 10. Epist. 37.

what he calls an evil and immoderate superstition, *i. e.* an invincible resolution in their adherence to their Christian profession. This is the most *ample vindication* that can possibly be of the *excellent nature and tendency* of the *Christian* religion, which indeed binds men together under the most sacred and solemn obligations to commit no kind of wickedness whatsoever, but to practise every day all the virtues that can adorn private and social life, as they would escape *everlasting condemnation* before the tribunal of Christ, and secure to themselves the invaluable blessedness of *eternal life*, which he is to bestow on his faithful servants at his second appearance. Such a religion is the most favourable to all the best interests of kingdoms and nations, the strongest possible security to government, and if duly regarded by those who make the external profession of it, would spread harmony, peace, and happiness throughout all the various ranks and orders of mankind, and establish and perpetuate these substantial blessings to the end of time. But thus much as to the first particular; the *remarks* on St. Paul's *conduct* before *Felix*, to which the words of my text direct us. I proceed,

II. To make some *observations* from them, of a more *generally instructive and practical nature*, and there are several which deserve our serious attention.

i. That *preaching* on *moral* subjects, such as *righteousness* and *temperance*, is preaching concerning the *faith in Christ*, *i. e.* on such subjects,

subjects, as the principles of the *Christian* religion; or the doctrines of Christ lead to, and enjoin the practice of; for the sacred writer informs us, that *Felix heard Paul concerning the faith in Christ, as the Apostle reasoned concerning righteousness and temperance and judgment to come*, and therefore these subjects must all belong to the Christian faith; the judgment to come as an important principle of it, and righteousness and temperance as essential duties, to the practice of which that awful doctrine is a very powerful motive. Though morality is not the *whole* of the gospel, and though preaching should not be entirely *confined* to it; yet undoubtedly it is one *main* and *essential part* of it, and should be frequently inculcated on the minds of Christians, that their knowledge in Christ *may not be barren and unfruitful*; and the preaching on these *duties* is as really to preach concerning the *faith of Christ*, as to preach on other subjects, which relate more immediately to the *person, offices, and glory of Christ*. For he who preaches on these, preaches but on one part of the Christian religion; and if he neglects to awaken men, by a proper improvement of these doctrines, to regard the duties of moral virtue, which are inserted into and strongly inculcated by the gospel revelation, he cannot be said to declare the *whole counsel* and will of God; especially as all the doctrines more immediately relating to Christ are intended to promote, and can be of no great consequence any farther than as they promote the practice

of temperance and righteousness towards God and man. And though it is certainly true, that the preaching moral virtue is not *properly* and *directly* preaching the faith of Christ, unless it be suitably enforced with motives *peculiar* to his gospel; so let me add, that even preaching concerning the person and offices of Christ, is *not* preaching concerning the faith in Christ, according to the design and intention of his gospel, unless such subjects are improved to *promote* the practice of *religion* and *virtue*. Men may dispute about religion as long as they please, but the nature of it is fixed and immutable, and will not bend either to their prejudices or vices. It consists not in *speculation* but *practice*; and the end of revelation is not to fill their minds with useless principles and notions, but to bring them to the knowledge and belief of a few plain intelligible doctrines, by the influence of which they may be enabled to govern their passions, to forsake their sins, and become reconciled to God, by diligently *following after that holiness, without which none shall see, or be accepted of him*. And amongst all the duties of practical religion, there are none of greater importance to the welfare of societies, the honour and usefulness of particular persons, and the credit of religion, than those of temperance and righteousness, concerning which the Apostle *reasoned before Felix*, when he desired to hear him concerning the *faith in Christ*, and therefore these things should be *faithfully* and *frequently insisted on* by those
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who preach the faith, and seriously regarded by those who hear them.

2. Though preaching on *moral* subjects is preaching concerning the *faith of Christ*, yet they should never be preached without being enforced by *principles* and *motives* properly *Christian*; and especially that awful and important one, the *future judgment by Jesus Christ*, according to the example of the Apostle before *Felix*. 'Twas this very consideration, that made *Felix* tremble; who would have known nothing of the faith of Christ, had the Apostle entertained him only with a discourse of temperance and righteousness, without introducing the doctrine of Christ to enforce it; and he might have passed for a very sensible *Platonist*, or *Stoick*, or one of any other of the sects of *moral philosophers*, had he sunk his Christianity, and made no mention of the name or doctrine of Jesus Christ. But *Felix* wanted to hear him concerning the *faith of Christ*, and had the Apostle omitted to introduce him in his reasonings concerning moral virtue, he had disappointed the *Roman* governor's expectation, and acted unworthy his own character, as an Apostle of Christ. And what can the preachers of Christianity do better than imitate the Apostle in this respect? Or what more effectual motive can they urge to enforce their duties?

'Tis true, there are *other* arguments, which may with great propriety and advantage be urged in their turn, to awaken men's regard to these important obligations; such particu-

larly as are derived from their own *natural fitness* and *intrinsic excellency*, according to St. Paul's example who to the *Philippians* says †: *If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things*; such as are derived from their *present utility*, and their tendency to promote the true interest of life, according to our blessed Lord †: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*; and St. Peter §: *He that loves life, and would see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile*; or such as may be drawn from the *infamy* and *bad effects* of the contrary vices, as St. Paul ||: *What fruit had ye in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed, the end of which things is death*? Every argument that is of weight, and hath a tendency to move and persuade, may in its proper season be rightly applied, and ought to be urged, as circumstances require, and as may best answer the purpose of bringing men to the approbation and practice of the great duties of religion and virtue. But the motives offered by, and peculiar to *Christianity*, are of all others the *most powerful*, and best calculated to impress the mind, and excite and influence men to regard the great duties of human life, and live in a constant, regular observance of them; because they have a natural, unalterable importance in them, immediately affect their hopes and fear, and are equally fit for all sorts of men, and for all seasons and occasions of life.

† Phil. iv. 8.
|| Rom. vi. 21.

† Mat. v. 5.

§ 1 Pet. iii. 10.

The enforcing moral virtues by their natural obligation, and original fitness, may well enough suit and be extremely pleasing to those few who are of a speculative and philosophical turn; but will prove a method of conviction and persuasion a little too abstract and difficult for the *generality* of mankind; to whom moral fitness and beauty are not so easily and clearly perceptible; and therefore will not strike the mind with that peculiar force, which is necessary to render them available against the strong bias of inclination and the influence of the numerous and strong temptations, that every where and every day abound in the world, and so powerfully seduce the sons of men to do evil. Arguments drawn from the present advantages of practising moral virtue, such as reputation, prosperity of circumstances, length of life, peace of mind, self-approbation, and other things of like nature, depend, as to the effect and influence of them, in a great measure *on opinion and example*; and if we have nothing farther to recommend and enforce them will be void of all good effect upon those, who either despise the censure of the world, or make prevailing customs the great rule of their conduct; who are above reputation and character, who think the only use and advantages of riches and plenty is self-indulgence and gratification, and who have learnt to throw off all regard to length of life, provided they can but spend it agreeable to their wishes and inclinations during the continu-
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ance of it. But the arguments derived from *revelation* to enforce the practice of moral virtues are of a *superior* rank, and if men will hear, and have any passions in their natures to be moved; if they are not so hardened in vice as to be incapable of all impression, and have not so deeply involved themselves in guilt, as to be entirely forsaken of God, and judicially given up to a reprobate mind; they will not fail to strike the stoutest heart with terror, nor to awaken such kindly sentiments and strong convictions in the mind, as will, if duly improved and attended to, under the blessing of God, effectually bring them to repentance, and render them in good earnest solicitous, what they shall do to be saved.

It is true indeed, that as the most effectual and powerful prescriptions in physic, administered by the most skilful hand, will remove no distemper, nor restore the labouring patient to health, if he will not submit to the *regular use of them*, or if by any *imprudences* or excesses he obstinately prevents their natural operation; so with respect to the *peculiar motives of Christianity*, if men will *never duly attend to them*, never weigh their importance, or *immediately suppress* the convictions, excited in their own minds by them, either by the cares of life, or immersing themselves more deeply in criminal gratifications and pleasures; these motives can be of no manner of advantage to them, and they must, in the natural course of things,

go on impenitent and unreclaimed, till they die and perish in their sins, wholly incapable of salvation and mercy. But whilst there are any remains of conscience, any good principles or affections to be wrought on, the gospel enforcements of moral virtue, represented in their proper strength, and considered as their importance deserve, will not, cannot fail to awaken in them such apprehensions, such hopes and fears, such strong convictions of the evil of a sinful course, and the absolute necessity of returning to a life of piety and virtue, as under the blessing of God will prove effectual to their entire recovery and final acceptance with him.

The *motives* offered by the *gospel* revelation are *various*, and taken from objects of the *utmost importance*, and the *most sacred and affecting nature*; such as the authority and command of God; the infinite purity of his nature, and his hatred of sin; the great intention of his moral providence and government, which is to encourage the practice of righteousness, and restrain or recover men from those crimes which are his abhorrence; his great compassion and merciful disposition, and willingness to grant to all sinners the benefit of repentance and reformation; his *sending his Son into the world to seek and to save those that are lost*; the benevolence and love of Christ in dying to redeem them from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of all good works; and especially his being appointed at the last great day to be the judge

judge of the whole world; when the intemperate gratifications of corrupt men, their impure indulgences, the ruin of the innocence, peace, and usefulness of those whom they have made subservient to their ambition, avarice, and pleasures, and the destruction or suppression of their own natural sentiments of probity, honour, justice and compassion, shall be recalled to their remembrance, appear in all their dreadful circumstances of aggravation, and receive from him the due recompence of divine vengeance: When neither the dignity of those characters they may now sustain, their titles of honour, their possessions and abundance, their families, connections and interests in life, nor any of the advantages they can here boast of, shall be of any avail to ward off the sentence of the impartial judge, or shelter them from the stroke of that almighty arm, which shall then be lifted up for their total destruction: When the eternal consequences of divine anger shall pursue their crimes, when the Redeemer himself shall pronounce them *accursed*, heaven shall reject, and for ever close its gates against them, when they shall be forsaken of God, shunned by his holy angels, avoided by all the wise, the religious, virtuous, recovered part of mankind, as contagion itself, and marked out by the eternal God as the *vessels of wrath, endured with much long-suffering, and fitted for destruction*; when that faith, piety and virtue, which they wickedly despised, shall appear to be the only distinctions of mankind, which
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which God regards, and the sole qualifications for eternal happiness; when the followers of Christ in righteousness and temperance, and all the other excellencies of the Christian life and character, shall be owned as the only genuine children of wisdom, and justified by her final and irreversible sentence, shall obtain the approbation of heaven and earth, and through the equity and mercy of God, and the kind and all-powerful intercession of Christ, be accounted worthy to obtain the inestimable recompence of eternal life and glory.

When moral virtues, righteousness and temperance, benevolence and charity, meekness and humility, truth and sincerity, the peaceable and forgiving spirit, and the like excellent dispositions are warmly enforced by these awful and affecting considerations, one would imagine that no one would be insensible of and unmoved by them. And indeed it scarce seems possible, unless their *consciences are seared*, and they are wholly forsaken of God; or unless, like *Felix*, who owned by trembling the sacred force of them, they *defer* all reflection on them, instantly *suppress* the convictions they raise, and thus counteract the kind intention of God to bring them to repentance and salvation. If these motives fail, 'tis certain that sinners must be incurable by all common and ordinary methods; since no considerations can be found more weighty than these to influence and persuade them.

Upon the whole: What is our own *character*? Are we *conscious* to ourselves of the habitual

tual violation of any of the rules of *righteousness* and *temperance*, or any other branch of moral virtue? Let us permit our consciences to speak the truth. There is a day coming, when we shall not be able to suppress the voice of it. 'Tis folly and cruelty to ourselves, and disobedience to God, to suppress it now. The consequences of our actions will hereafter overtake us; and whatever hopes we may derive from the grace of God, nothing is more certain than these hopes will finally fail us, if that grace doth *not* teach us to *deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world.*

S E R M O N XII.

Practical Reflections on St. *Paul's*
reasoning with *Felix*.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered: Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.

I Have from these words made *some remarks* on the *conduct* of St. *Paul* before *Felix*, the Roman governor; considered particularly the *subjects* on which he insisted before him, when he sent for him, that he might hear him concerning the *faith in Christ*, those of *righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*; and shewn you his great *prudence* in the choice of these articles; the *delicacy* and *politeness* of the manner in which he reproved him, and brought his crimes to remembrance, by insisting on these heads; that 'twas in *obedience* to the governor's order, that he set before him this summary of the Christian doctrine; and that this account of the faith in Christ was wisely

calculated to *vindicate himself* from the accusations of his enemies, and *the religion of Christ*, for the preaching of which he had been indicted as a *pestilent fellow*, and a *mover of sedition* throughout the world.

And as this history will furnish us with several *observations* of a *practical* nature, and *general use*; I have remarked:

1. That *preaching on moral duties and virtues* is preaching *the faith or doctrine of Christ*. And

2. That the most *effectual* manner of *enforcing the practice of moral virtues* is by urging those *arguments and motives* which are *derived from, and peculiar to the doctrine of Christ*. But farther,

3. It may be observed, that if the *preaching the faith of Christ* should prove *ineffectual* to convince, reform and save men, it is not owing to any *deficiency* of power and efficacy in the *doctrine itself*, but to men's *own fault*, who will *not attend* to it, and prevent or destroy the influence of it upon their own minds. *Felix*, though of a most profligate character; yet was not able to resist the impression that the doctrine of Christ made on him, but *trembled* on his tribunal before the prisoner, when he heard him preaching on those virtues which his own conscience told him he was not possessed of, and representing to him the certainty of that future judgment to which he, though himself an earthly judge, was to be brought, equally with the meanest of mankind. To what then was it owing,
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that he did not become a better man, and a convert to the doctrine of Christ? Why plainly, to his *not cherishing his convictions*, but immediately suppressing them. He dismisses the preacher, and tells him, when *he had a convenient season he would send for him again*; and thus soon gets rid of all his terrors, and in spite of them continues the same oppressive, intemperate wretch, that he had been before.

The effect of *principles* on the minds of men depends in great measure on the *temper* of those to whom the knowledge of them is vouchsafed. If they do not give a *full unfeigned assent* to them, 'tis impossible they should carry any influence; because the real or apprehended truth of any doctrine, is a circumstance absolutely necessary to render it persuasive and efficacious. Should they apprehend it to be *true*, yet if it be not regarded by them as *important*, the motive arising from it will be proportionably small, and can never become superior to any higher and stronger principle and motive of action. Yea, should both the truth and importance of it at any time appear to them, yet if they *exclude* it from their minds, and will *never* impress it on their hearts by *serious reflection*, it will be as unaffected and destitute of power, as though they had never known, or never believed it. The principles of *moral truth* do not in any case operate by necessity and carry an *irresistible* influence and force with them, so as to controul and compel men's conduct, whe-

ther they will or no. If they reject, or will not attend to their evidence, 'tis impossible that power can ever create the belief of them; or if they resolve to exclude them from their thoughts, they cannot in the nature of things ever be habitually present to them; or should they at any time raise any convictions and right apprehensions in their minds, these impressions will as certainly, as easily, and as soon die, as any others whatsoever, that are not cherished and kept alive by a due attention to them. So that the *inefficacy* of the gospel doctrine upon many of those, who profess to believe it, may be fully accounted for, without censuring that doctrine as *insufficient* in its own nature, and destitute of proper power to persuade and excite them. If it be no objection against the principles of *natural religion*, that they do not irresistibly force all those who profess to believe them to act agreeable to those principles, it can be no objection against those of *revealed*, that they do not operate on the mind by an irresistible compulsion. 'Tis a sufficient vindication of the doctrine of *Christ*, that it offers to men's consideration much *more powerful* inducements to piety and moral virtue, than *natural religion* ever did, or can do: Yea, it sets before them the *most* important motives, and powerful arguments, that can possibly be suggested to their consciences; and that will weigh down in the scale of reason and truth every thing that can be laid in the balance against them. And there is nothing more cer-

certain; than that the Christian doctrine of a *future judgment by Christ*, and the *eternal consequences* of happiness or misery, that are hereafter to attend the actions of men in the present life, as they have been good or evil, doth carry in it the strongest possible persuasions and excitements to exercise a *conscience void of offence towards God and man*, and that if these prove ineffectual, they must in the ordinary course of things ever remain obstinate and irreclaimable. Again,

4. When men cannot bear to hear *moral virtues* inculcated upon them, and censure such kind of discourses as *legal* and *unevangelical*; it looks, as if like *Felix*, they had some inward consciousness of their being very *defective and faulty in these duties*, and do not love to be told of them, because their hearts reproach them for the want of them. Few men surely can be so extremely weak, or so absolutely corrupted in their judgment, as to persuade themselves, that *righteousness* and *temperance* and other moral virtues are *unnecessary*, and of *no obligation under Christianity*; and if they are essential duties of the Christian life, why should they not be recommended and enforced? If we are *conscious* to ourselves, that we *habitually* practise them, we can have no real cause to be *displeased* when we are put in mind of them; on the contrary, such a testimony of the heart in our own favour, is joyous in its nature, and a just foundation for satisfaction and comfort, as it is a solid proof of the good influence of our Christian

principles, and that the faith by which we live is indeed the *faith of God's elect*, through which we are justified and accepted of God. Nor can the enforcing *moral virtues* by considerations drawn from a *future judgment*, ever disturb the peace of *virtuous* persons, or awaken any just terrors in their minds; because if they are righteous and temperate themselves, and think on and do every thing that is virtuous and praise-worthy, they can never be condemned for unrighteousness and intemperance, and other immoralities of a wicked life, but must so far stand acquitted and approved at the day of judgment; and may therefore well suffer these important duties to be enforced on them, and themselves to be exhorted to continue and abound in them, by all those motives which a future judgment can furnish; because they conscientiously regard these duties, and are determined continually to practise them, and therefore know that the future judgment will in this respect be favourable to them, and that they have every thing to promise themselves from the impartiality and equity of it. But it is by no means to be wondered at, that such who allow themselves in *unjust* and *intemperate* practices, and the habitual violation of the precepts of God's moral law, should *disrelish the sound doctrine* of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, as that enjoins the strictest sanctity of manners, and all the good works of Christian piety and virtue; because this is virtually upbraiding them for their want of them, and must excite

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in them those reproaches of conscience, which are very troublesome to those that feel them, and make them uneasy in those practices, in which they had rather go on quiet and undisturbed. To tell such that *God will bring them into judgment*, and that they must be accountable before the tribunal of Christ, for their unjust acquisitions, their intemperance, their impurities, and every presumptuous sin to which they have indulged, is to put a scourge into the hand of conscience, and deliver them over to a severe tormentor; and if they will not be prevailed on, by the uneasiness of their own reflections, to take the proper method of repentance and reformation for restoration of their peace; they will strive to get rid of their uneasiness, and go smoothly on in their favourite sins, by such means as their corrupt passions and prejudices suggest to them. They will strive to persuade themselves, that *faith* will supply the *want of works*, that moral virtue is a *low* attainment for a Christian, that the exhorting men to it, by the terrors of a future judgment, is preaching the *law* and not the *gospel*, and that the great things, which deserve to be insisted on, and which they ought continually to be entertained with are, *grace*, the *precious promises*, the *righteousness and merits of Christ*, and other comfortable doctrines, which may create in them an assurance of salvation, without any regard to heathenish morality, or those good works, which, when represented as necessary, they consider as derogatory to the glory of that *free*

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grace, by which they are to be made *accepted in the Beloved*. But surely the state of such Christians must be *extreamly dangerous*, who take offence at that part of Christ's doctrine, which teaches them righteousness, temperance, and other branches of moral virtue, and enjoins the practice of them by the awes of a future judgment; who are uneasy, when these instances of duty are insisted on, because they are conscious that they act contrary to them; and instead of quieting their minds, by forsaking their sins, and acting a wiser and better part, take refuge in false principles, and by perverting the doctrine of Christ buoy up their hopes in a way that is not good, and which if they continue to walk in, must issue in their final disappointment and destruction. Again,

5. As St. Paul reasoned before Felix, concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, this shews us the *proper way*, in which these important subjects, and other doctrines and duties of Christianity, should be treated; they should, in imitation of our Apostle, be reasoned on, and *reasoned on* in such a manner, as to carry *evidence and conviction* both of their *truth and importance* *. In this sense of *reasoning*, the original word is certainly made use of, and is rightly rendered in our version. They should be carefully *explained*, and the nature of them clearly opened. They should be established by *proper arguments*, and as far

* Sext. Empir. ad. Math. l. 3. § 9. p. 312.

as *peculiar* to Christianity, by the *testimony* of those *sacred records* which contain them; so as may awaken such convictions of conscience, as are necessary to render them influential and efficacious. The reasoning made use of should unquestionably be such, as is suited to the *capacity* of those who are to be impressed by them; but still the reasoning should be *real* and *sound*, from principles of truth, and such certain topics as may shew the grounds and certainty of the things asserted, and as may fully persuade the mind to assent to and embrace them. Even truth itself can never be received by reasonable minds, but upon the foundation of evidence, though all evidence is not equally strong, nor the same evidence necessary for all; nor can religion and virtue ever be rightly embraced, and habitually submitted to, without previously knowing what they are, and without proper conviction of their evidence and obligation; and faith without any reason for believing, is an *unreasonable faith*; and religious actions, without knowing why we perform them, are *superstition*, and not genuine piety. The very *presenting ourselves to God, as an holy living acceptable sacrifice*, must, according to *St. Paul*, be a *reasonable service*; and the persuading men to this comprehensive duty of religion, without convincing them by just reasons of the propriety and necessity of doing it, is persuading them to do a very good thing, by a very weak, imprudent, and unjustifiable method. And therefore he who cannot reason well, con-

cerning the principles and obligations of Christianity, is *not fit to preach* to others concerning them, or likely to make converts to truth and righteousness; and they who hope to do it, by rash and strong assertions, noisy declamations, quaint expressions, low similes, and the like methods of many modern, popular preachers, must hope to do it by *the real foolishness of preaching*; which, though it may draw others into enthusiasm and superstition, can never make them Christians upon real principles, nor render them able to give a good account of what they believe, or vindicate themselves from the charge of presumption and credulity. If we would *imitate St. Paul*, in his manner of preaching concerning the faith of Christ, we must *reason* upon our subjects, and draw men by the light of their understanding, and the powerful convictions of their consciences, to the belief and obedience of the gospel.

6. As *Felix trembled*, when he heard St. Paul reasoning concerning *righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*; this shews the *great sensibility* of a *bad conscience*, and how extremely *unhappy* he who liath it must be, when it thus takes the alarm, and fills men with terror, at the most inoffensive, pleasing, and interesting subjects. There is nothing in the doctrines themselves, on which the Apostle discoursed, that naturally tends to make men tremble. Righteousness and temperance are essential duties of human life, that render mens characters respectable, and the practice of

of them secures the most pleasing approbation of their own minds, and that peace of conscience, which is one of the most desirable blessings of human life, and without which no external advantages can be of any avail to their happiness. And as these virtues are acceptable to God, and approved by men, they will stand the test before the most awful and impartial tribunal that can be erected, and they who practise these can have nothing to fear from the sentence of God upon account of them. And for this reason the doctrine and consideration of a future judgment affords a very grateful prospect to just and good men; who far from slavishly trembling at it, rejoice in the belief and prospect of it, as that blessed season, when they shall lift up their heads with joy, have their integrity publicly approved, be solemnly acquitted from every charge against them, and accepted and rewarded as *good and faithful servants*. What then was it that shook *Felix* with *terror*? His conscience, that immediately perceived where the discourse pointed, and which grew angry and offended, because wounded in a most sensible part, by an invenomed secret sting, that gave it an anguish he was incapable of enduring. When our Apostle *reasoned of temperance*, his heart smote him; because he knew that he lived in the most *criminal indulgences*, and had been guilty of the most lawless excesses and impurities; and when he reasoned of *righteousness*, it made him *uneasy*, because it brought to his mind all those *exactions, rapines, and cruelties,*

cruelties, with which he had been chargeable during his whole government in *Judea*. But when the Apostle reasoned of judgment to come, by shewing the *certainty* and *impartiality* of it, and that intemperance and injustice would then bring men under condemnation, and that the dignity of their stations and characters in this world would not exempt them from the punishment due to their aggravated transgressions; the subject became *too serious* for *Felix* to endure it any longer, and the *alarm* grew *so strong*, that it betrayed itself in his countenance, and put his whole body into such an agitation, as discovered the inward anguish and terror that laid hold of and oppressed him: And therefore not able to bear the reproach of such a discourse any longer, he dismissed the Apostle, and lost all curiosity to hear any thing farther concerning the faith in Christ. Though the discourse was managed with the utmost delicacy, the reproof found its way into the governor's breast, and made him shake for fear on his tribunal.

And indeed there is such a *natural* and *intrinsic evil* in sin, that though men are oftentimes hurried on by warm passions and the violence of inclination to their respective vices, before they have time to consider the nature and consequences of their actions; yet whenever reason and reflection return, and they have time to review the crimes they have been guilty of, they immediately perceive the natural turpitude and exceeding sinfulness of them, and cannot help censuring and condemning
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ing themselves for having acted contrary to decency, the propriety of things, and the most certain dictates of obligation and duty. As there is a necessary difference between good and evil, that no circumstance of time or place can alter, and reconcile with each other, this difference is so plain and obvious as that no man, who hath the use of reason, can help discerning it, without any laboured proof, or long train of reasoning to convince him of it; nor will he fail to give the preference, upon an impartial examination, to religion and virtue, and to allow that they are excellent and praise-worthy in their nature, as well as attended with the most beneficial consequences, of a private and public nature, when duly regarded, as the great rules of mens actions throughout the whole of life. And whatever may be the pleasures and advantages of sin, yet upon cool reflection, it appears in such colours of baseness and folly, as to excite the indignation, shame and abhorrence of the sinner himself, and he cannot help acknowledging, that the part he hath acted hath been the most irrational and absurd. Hence it is, that bad men, who cannot reconcile themselves to the rules of virtue, yet commend and approve it in others; and though they cannot persuade themselves to part with their own sins, yet very freely condemn them, when practised by others; because in them they view them without partiality, and have no interest to bias them to pass a wrong judgment concerning the nature of them.

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Hence also when *bad* men come to the *close of life*, they are frequently filled with the strongest convictions of the folly and unreasonableness of their past conduct, because then their reflections are deliberate and serious; the charm that blinded and rendered them insensible is broken, they see things as they really are, and grow distressed for that they have lived under so long and fatal a delusion.

And this *anxiety* of mind that arises from a clear apprehension of the *intrinsic evil* and *exceeding sinfulness of sin*, is greatly heightened and aggravated, when men come to consider the probable and certain *consequences* of their crimes, and that *future tribunal* before which they must finally answer for all the irregularities and excesses of their lives. Every one knows, that by the *consciousness* of his own mind, he is *accountable* in his very *nature*, and this is a strong presumption that he shall be *actually* accountable; for it cannot well be supposed, that God would endow man with so very extraordinary a capacity for no reason, or with an intention, that this wonderful property of his nature should be, absolutely *useless*. As well may we suppose, that he gave him the faculty of perception without designing he should perceive, or the power of governing himself by reason and judgment, without any purpose and view of his directing his conduct by either. And indeed this persuasion of our being finally accountable for our present behaviour, is wrought into our frame, and

closely

closely connected with the belief of the being and providence of God ; and though too many do not habitually attend to it, as they ought to do, yet few or none can wholly get rid of the apprehension, and there are seasons and intervals of reflections, in which the awful thought will recur, and strike them with an heart-felt terror for what may be the dreadful consequence of their past transgressions. In more *ingenuous* and sensible persons, these terrors produce *repentance, amendment, and acceptance* of the mercy and salvation, which God is graciously pleased to offer by Christ ; whilst others whose bad habits are incurable, and who are so thoroughly hardened in sin as to be incapable of being reclaimed, get rid of their fears, by keeping, as far as they can, out of the way of every thing that may awaken and irritate them ; and either *involve* themselves more entirely in *secular pursuits*, or *immerse* themselves deeper in *sensual and criminal pleasures*, to silence and extinguish the voice of conscience, and utterly suppress all the fears of a future judgment. And indeed the consideration, that there is a *day appointed*, in which, upon the Christian scheme, *all men* must account for their actions before the impartial *tribunal of Christ*, and receive according to the things done in the body, whether good or evil, the retributions of eternal life or death, presents so many reasons of fear and distress to the minds of habitual sinners, as that there is no way to secure themselves from them, but either by *desperately hardening* their consciences,

so

so as to render them wholly callous and insensible, and madly resolving to bury all serious thought and reflection, that the nature and consequences of their actions may never trouble them; or by that safer method, which reason suggests, revelation points out, and wise men always have recourse to; a *timely retreat* from the guilty and destructive paths of sin, a sincere return to their duty to God by the practice of righteousness, and a *thankful acceptance* by faith of that eternal *redemption*, which hath been wrought out for them by the sufferings and death and intercession of Jesus Christ. If our apprehensions and fears are attended with these kindly and happy effects, the causes of them will at once cease, and they will give us no farther uneasiness and pain. The most lively descriptions of piety and virtue will not cause conscience to upbraid us with the want of them; and though the *terrors of the Lord* in the final judgment should be set before us, in the most awful and awakening representations; the remembrance that we have been *persuaded by them, to live, not unto ourselves, but unto him, who died for us, and rose again,* will keep us in *perfect peace* in the believing prospect of that important event, and inspire the secret and blessed hope, that we shall *obtain mercy in this great day of the Lord.* Once more,

7. We may learn from the account here given us of the conduct of *Felix*, the *exceeding great deceitfulness of sin*, in causing men to suppress

suppress those friendly convictions they ought to cherish, and to *defer* their repentance and reformation to some future and distant opportunity. When his conscience smote him for the crimes, which *St. Paul's* preaching brought to his remembrance, and he found himself not able to endure the reproaches of it, what doth he do to quiet them? Instead of *resolving* to become *immediately* a better man, and remove the real causes of his fears, he resolves to *get rid of the Apostle*, and to hear nothing more concerning that faith in Christ, which did not suit with his inclinations and character, and made him extremely uneasy, when he saw his own features, as they were drawn and presented to him by the prisoner at his bar. *Felix trembled*, and answered him: *Go thy way; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee*; when I am more at leisure to attend such discourses, and better disposed for repentance and reformation, I will hear thee again on this subject. And here the behaviour of this unhappy man is a true *representation* of the temper and conduct of too many in our *own times*. They cannot with all their art and struggles with themselves, rid themselves of the belief of the great principles of religion. The difference between moral good and evil, the accountableness of all men in a future life, and the rewards and punishments that are hereafter to take place in consequence of the final judgment, appear with such evidence and conviction to their minds, as that they cannot discard them as precarious and false.

Though

Though they often wish to do it, and practise every method to obtain their wish, that a bad heart, and a perverted judgment can dictate to them; yet still conscience frequently reluctates, and reason continues, in every hour of reflection, to suggest: *For all these things God will bring thee into judgment, and the end of them must be death.* Upon this account they are liable to perpetual suspicion and fear. Their very pleasures are often interrupted. Every place, every company is displeasing to them, where the principles of religion are the subject of conversation: If they at any time attend the solemnities of worship, nothing is more burthenfome to them than public instruction. Every description of vice is a description of themselves. Every commendation of virtue, and excitement to the duties of the Christian life, is a reproach of their conduct; and if the terrors of the judgment-day are impartially and seriously displayed, there is somewhat whithin them that immediately makes the application, and tells them: *Thou must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, and stand acquitted or condemned by his sentence.* Hence arises conscious shame and fear; shame to see themselves drawn in all the odious colours of vice that deform them; and fear, because put in mind of that great event, in which they themselves are so nearly and deeply interested.

And as this shame arises from a real conviction, that they cannot suppress, of the natural intrinsic evil of sin, and their fears are

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excited by the consideration of that day of account, which they can neither prevent or defer; one would think that the worst of men, in such circumstances, should immediately resolve to remove the causes of both, and when convinced of the folly and danger of their courses, determine without delay to correct and amend them. For why should they be ashamed of sin, if there be nothing odious and vile in it? Why should the recollection of their crimes ever make them tremble, if there be no evil consequences that await the commission of them? Or why should the thoughts of a future judgment appall and distress them, if there be no foundation for the belief of it, or if they can vindicate their conduct before the impartial tribunal of a righteous God? And yet is this always, or generally the case? No. In opposition to all their most serious apprehensions, as though the principles of religion were all precarious, and had no evidence, or shew of evidence to support them, and all the alarms and terrors of their consciences were the most irrational and vain, and mere phantoms, raised by imagination and superstition; they cannot resolve to yield to the impressions of their minds; instead of *cherishing* their convictions, they study to *suppress* them, and rather than improve their sense of danger to the purpose of self-preservation, their care is to extinguish it, that they may continue in their vices, without any thing to interrupt them, and boldly press on to ruin.

without ever thinking or seeing the dreadful destruction that is before them. Hence they *shun* the company of wise and cautious men, because they hate their admonitions, and desire to be under no restraint from their authority and example. As for all *public instruction*, they esteem it *impertinent*, because they generally find it contrary to their taste, and introducing into their minds certain troublesome guests, they have no inclination to harbour, or have any kind of acquaintance with; and therefore utterly *desert* the house of God, cast contempt on the means that should bring them to reflection, and as for *preachers*, their language is: *Go your way, we are not at leisure* to hear or regard you. Keep your grave lessons to yourselves. When the season of pleasure and enjoyment is over, it will be then time enough to attend and listen to them. If at any time, by some peculiar circumstances, or by the continued obstinacy of conscience in rebuking them, their fears are roused, and their apprehensions of danger revive and grow strong, instead of improving the one, or prudently hearkening to the other, they *run from themselves* to their companions in sin for refuge, and bury all reflection and fear in fresh acts of riot and intemperance; whereby all their awes of God's displeasure entirely vanish, and lose all their efficacy and power; and they learn to make themselves easy, not by the necessary care to ward off the danger that threatens them, but by methods that enhance their

their guilt, and render them exposed to a more aggravated destruction. Such is the strength of their corrupt habits, so dreadfully are they enslaved to their passions, and so entirely *bardened* and blinded by the *deceitfulness of sin*, that rather than be prevailed with immediately to listen to the faithful admonitions of their own minds, the friendly suggestions of the good Spirit of God, and the loudest calls of their interest and duty; they turn a deaf ear to them all, still defer their return to God, and refuse to become reconciled to him, and thus render the strivings of his Spirit, and all the endeavours of his providence and grace, absolutely ineffectual to convert and save them.

8. Lastly, this passage shews us the true reason, why *corrupt and profligate* men throw up all regard to *public instruction*, and treat the *institutions of religion* with *negligence and contempt*, and the extreme folly of this conduct. *Felix trembled* when St. Paul reasoned of moral virtues and a future judgment to come. And what was the method he took to get rid of the pannaic that seized him on so important an occasion? The natural and reasonable one undoubtedly was, to attend to the real causes of it, and endeavour the cure and removal of them. If he trembled at the doctrine of a future judgment, because he was conscious that he had violated the obligations of righteousness and temperance, he should, if he had acted the wise and prudent part,

have immediately resolved to forsake his former vices, to become a just and temperate man, and embrace those doctrines of Christianity, which would have restored him, upon his recovery to virtue, to the full possession and peace of his mind, and enabled him to think of the day of future retribution even with comfort and satisfaction. But how contrary was the conduct of this unhappy Roman? *Felix trembled and answered: Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.* He could not persuade himself to become a better man. The spoils of violence and tyranny were too large to be given up for the moderate advantages of a just and equitable government. *Drusilla's* adulterous charms had insinuated themselves too deep into his heart for him to prevail with himself to renounce them; and though the doctrine of a judgment to come awakened in him such convictions as made him sit uneasy upon his tribunal, yet rather than yield to them, his heart immediately suggested an easier and speedier method to get rid of his terrors, than by repentance and reformation; viz. by *dismissing* the troublesome preacher, and resolving to hear no more of that faith in Christ, which he found so troublesome and offensive to him. But how *contrary* to all the rules of *prudence* is such a conduct? If there be nothing in immorality and wickedness that is wrong, no fatal and destructive consequences attending it, why should the consciousness of mens

crimes ever render them uneasy? If the doctrine of a life and judgment to come be in its nature absurd, or if vice can hold up its head, and urge any sufficient apology in its own vindication at the impartial tribunal of God, 'tis ridiculous and unmanly to be in any terror at the thoughts of it. This would be to fear *where no fear is*, and the effect of a vain and irrational superstition; and if men can go on in the practice of sin without danger, and with the full and entire approbation of their own reason and judgment, they may proceed with ease, and can have no just cause for uneasiness and dread.

But if men are *conscious to themselves*, upon impartial reflection, that sin hath an intrinsic turpitude and folly in it, that it is injurious to all the best interests of human life, that it is in its nature offensive to God, and must fall under his final censure and condemnation, and they themselves *tremble* in the intervals of serious reflection, at the apprehended consequences of it, what can possibly vindicate the longer continuance in it for an hour or a day? If any of us are conscious that we have been offenders against God; that we have been chargeable with injustice, oppression, and fraud in our transactions with men, that we have in any instances acted contrary to the rules of sobriety, temperance and chastity, and if we know that the wrath of God will be revealed against all these and the like instances of immorality, why should we not immediately put away all

these things by repentance? *Say not* in your hearts to the convictions of your own breasts, and the fears that arise in them, in consequence of these convictions, like *Felix to Paul*: *Go your way for this time; when we have a convenient season, we will call for you.* What season can be more convenient to cease to do evil, and learn to do well, than the present? Why should we bid these suggestions of conscience go their way, which are in their nature friendly and salutary, are excited in us by the providence of God, and may be improved by us to our everlasting welfare and safety? If we dismiss them now, *when* think we will that *convenient* season come, when we shall be better able or willing to entertain them? It is a wise maxim in commercial life, never to leave any important business till *to-morrow*, that may and ought to be done *to-day*. And it is equally a rule of prudence in all the more important affairs of religion and morality, and in which our own eternal salvation and happiness are concerned. *To-day* is what we have in actual *possession*. But what is *to-morrow*.

To-morrow is a season ne'er may come,
Th' unmeaning language of the thoughtless fool,

That knows not how to rate the passing hour.

To-morrow is the lifeless sluggard's dream,
Who wastes the precious moments of to-day.

'Tis

'Tis the false dictate of a treacherous heart,
 That strives to cheat thee of the present
 season,
 By fond, delusive hopes of what is future.
 False trifler's always coming: Yet retiring.
 'Tis still to-day. Whole months and years
 pass on,
 And life runs out, before to-morrow's
 found.

Thus men deceive themselves out of their present interest and duty, and are prevailed on to postpone to some distant opportunity what is their immediate concern, and can never be delayed without exposing themselves to the utmost hazard of final destruction. Religion and virtue should enter into every age and condition of life. They claim the attention, deserve the regard, and will reward the care of *young and old, rich and poor*. The temper they create is the only source of self-enjoyment and real happiness. They regulate and heighten all the valuable pleasures of life, will give that comfort and peace in reflection, which will effectually preserve us from *bondage through the fears of death*; and whenever that important moment comes, which is to separate us from all the amusements and enjoyments of the present life, even *when flesh and heart shall fail us*, and that hour will approach, when nothing external shall be able to support us; then the consciousness of sincerity in our Christian profession, of a timely re-

formation from our sins, and our having been governed by the principles and rules of Christianity will inspire with a secret pleasure, and support through the mediation and merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, a lively hope of final acceptance with God, and be rewarded with *an abundant entrance into his eternal kingdom and glory.*



SER-

S E R M O N XIII.

Self-Dedication to GOD explained.

R O M. xii. I.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

TH E S E words are evidently an inference from what the Apostle had been saying in the foregoing chapters, and especially from what he had been reasoning, concerning the introduction of the Gentiles into the church of Christ, in the room of the *Jews*, whom God rejected for their unbelief and incurable wickedness. And as this admission of the Gentiles into the kingdom and church of the Messiah was an invaluable privilege, and owing to the mere undeserved grace and favour of God, he puts them in mind how much it became them to act suitable to the advantages they were made partakers of, as they would not share the fate of the unbelieving *Jews*, whom he utterly cut off from being his peculiar people.

people. To shew therefore the Gentile converts, what the Christian name and profession demanded of them, and what was the service they were to perform, in virtue of their being called to inherit the blessings of the gospel covenant, he addresses to them the exhortation contained in my text: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.* In speaking to which words I shall consider,

I. The nature of the exhortation. And

II. The manner and motives in and by which he enforces it.

I. I am to consider the nature of the exhortation, viz. that they would *present their bodies a living, holy, acceptable sacrifice unto God*; which words are an allusion to the ancient method of worshipping God by sacrifices; the sacrifices of dead beasts, which were presented to God, consecrated to him as his especial and peculiar property, and were to be offered according to those rules which were prescribed by him for this purpose. The sacrifice that is here in an especial manner referred to, is *the Holocaust*, or whole burnt-offering; which was entirely consumed by fire upon the altar, and no part of it to be put to any other use whatsoever. Agreeable to this ancient custom of worshipping God by sacrifices, the Apostle describes the nature of that worship which, as Christians, we are to pay him, under the sacrificial expression
of

of presenting ourselves as sacrifices to God, or entirely devoting ourselves to his use and service. Consider here,

1. That the sacrifice which the Apostle here is speaking of, is that of our bodies. *I beseech you, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God*; and he mentions the body particularly, because, as I have observed, he refers to the sacrifices under the law, which consisted of the bodies of beasts. But then it should be considered, that the whole person is frequently intended by either of the essential parts of which our frame is compounded, in the sacred writings, and in those of profane authors, the most polite and elegant of them; because the soul and body constitute the person; the body not acting but as animated by the soul, and the soul employing the several members of the body to execute its secret purposes and desires.

Thus when it is said †, *every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed*; no one need to be told that the meaning is, every person without exception; and, on the other hand, when men are said to *dishonour their bodies* by particular crimes, and commanded to *love their wives as their own bodies*, the meaning is dishonouring themselves, and loving their wives as themselves; and thus the presenting our bodies to God is the presenting ourselves to him in our entire persons, soul and body without exception. There is,

† Acts iii. 23.

however,

however, a peculiar propriety in this expression of presenting our bodies to God; because as the presenting the *Holocaust* to God was an open, public act, so also must the consecration of ourselves to him be. It must appear that we are devoted to his service, and as really separated from all the corruptions and pollutions of the world, as the *Holocaust* was from all ordinary and civil uses whatsoever. Now the soul acts by the body, which executes all its secret purposes, and is the proper instrument which it employs to perform its intentions and resolutions. We know nothing of what passes in the minds of men, what the governing state of their passions and affections, what their prevailing dispositions to God or man, but as they are discovered by some suitable actions of the body. These are a certain indication of them, and the presence of being devoted to God in our minds and hearts, when the actions of our lives discover nothing of it, or when our bodies are employed in and devoted to the service of sin, and alienated from God, is both hypocrisy and impiety; and therefore the body, as actuated by the mind, and employed by it in the whole conduct of life, is *the sacrifice* of which the Apostle speaks, and which he beseeches us by the mercies of God to consecrate to him. And as it is the *Holocaust*, or whole burnt-offering, which the Apostle he realludes to, which was entirely, and in all its parts appropriated to God; he must mean by the body, which he compares to it, the entire person;

son; the body in its whole fabric, with all its members and various actions; and the mind, with all those rational powers and faculties, by which the body in all its operations is influenced and governed. This is farther evident from what the Apostle adds,

2. That we must present our bodies *a living sacrifice unto God*. A *living sacrifice* stands here in opposition immediately to the *dead bodies* of slain beasts, which were presented to, and offered on God's altar. This of itself was an offering of no worth, and might be presented by the offerer without a single disposition of genuine piety, and therefore had no intrinsic efficacy and power to render the offerer acceptable to God. Under the gospel God requires a nobler sacrifice, a sacrifice of intrinsic worth, which whoever presents, presents the most valuable offering he can bring, and the best gift that God can ask or receive from him. Thou must present thy body, thyself, Christian, a living sacrifice to God; thy body, as animated by the rational immortal spirit; thy body, not as acting by instinct and inclination, not as performing lifeless, dead, unprofitable rites and ceremonies; but as actuated by reason and conscience, quickened and employed by principles of faith; excited by hope, reverence, affection, and gratitude; purified and enlivened by the sacred influences of the good Spirit of God; and thus rendered habile and fit for all the worthy and excellent services of true piety and goodness. All mere bodily actions, without these sacred springs and motives

tives to them, are, in the moral sense, the actions of a dead body; which then only properly lives, when it is under the habitual direction of the principle of a divine and spiritual life, that prompts to a reasonable behaviour, and such a conduct as hath no dependence on animal instincts, but is inspired by the worthiest sentiments, and directed to the most excellent ends and purposes. The offering our bodies to God in this sense is the great requirement of Christianity, 'tis the one great comprehensive obligation of our Christian profession, and what the Apostle means by his exhortation of

3. *Presenting our bodies* as a living sacrifice to God. The word *present* is a sacrificial term, and denotes the bringing the beast that was intended for the oblation, to the temple and altar of God, and thus offering it as a gift peculiarly devoted to him; and is used with great propriety by our Apostle, in this exhortation of my text to the *Roman* converts, that they should devote and consecrate themselves to God. For this presenting ourselves to him implies, the *serious acknowledgment* of God's supream and absolute *property* in us; the *deliberately*, absolutely, *yielding ourselves to him*, to be in all things governed by his will, and to employ all the powers of our minds, and the members of our bodies, for those purposes and uses, which he originally intended, and by the gospel of Christ requires they should be subservient to; and the *firm and fixed resolution* of our *unlimited submission to his will*, by making

making *our bodies the instruments of righteousness unto God.* The *head* should be employed in acquainting ourselves with him, and in the most serious inquiries into the nature of our duty, and the means and sources of our happiness. The *heart* should cherish and exercise those worthy affections and dispositions, as are suitable to the various relations in which we stand towards God and man. The *eyes* should contemplate God's works, and from the order, beauty and harmony which they discern in them, furnish us with occasions of gratitude and praise, and direct us into all those paths of life, which his wisdom and goodness have pointed to us for our daily perseverance and progress in them. Our *tongues* and our *lips* should be ever sacred to truth, peace, and righteousness, employed for the glory of God, the interest of religion, and the benefit and comfort of those we are concerned with; for the benevolent purposes of instructing, cautioning and comforting them; in healing of differences, stopping unkind and unfriendly reports, putting the best constructions upon doubtful actions, vindicating the absent when defamed, and in all other instances, to which the inward goodness and benevolence of the heart can direct and influence it. *Holy hands*, undefiled with any criminal practices, should be lift up to God in prayer and thanksgiving, and be employed in all the sacred services of justice and mercy. Our *feet* should be *shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, i. e.* should be prepared and made ready to go about,

about, and carry us to all those good and excellent services which the gospel of peace, the gospel which commands us *to follow the things that make for peace*, directs and enforces us. When we have thus consecrated ourselves entirely to God, look upon ourselves as his property, renounce every claim to our obedience that stands in competition with his, resolve upon an entire submission to his authority and will, and actually devote ourselves to him, to glorify him with soul and body, from the firm conviction that both are his, and with the entire consent and approbation of our own hearts, then we may be said in the full sense of the expression, to present our bodies as a real living sacrifice to God. And what the Apostle farther adds, as

4. *An holy sacrifice.* Present your bodies a living sacrifice, *holy, unto God.* The allusion is still kept up to the sacrifices under the law, which were to be absolutely without blemish, insomuch that whatever beast had any thing superfluous or defective, it was declared unfit for a sacrifice to God, and rejected from being offered on God's altar. Under the New Testament, as God requires a more excellent sacrifice, he doth also a more excellent kind of purity, a freedom from every moral blemish, a *sanctity of mind and manners* universal and uncorrupted. God is himself a Being of infinite rectitude and purity of nature, *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity* with approbation, and who as the *righteous lord loveth righteousness*, and commands us to be
holy

holy, as he himself is holy. And this holiness consists,

1. In keeping ourselves entirely free from and *undefiled* with the *criminal practices* of a corrupt and degenerate world. *Be ye not conformed*, says he, *to this world* *. He means the world in the *corrupt* principles and manners of it; the men of the world as *lying in wickedness*, and given up to commit the most offensive crimes. And if men would present themselves an holy, acceptable sacrifice to God, their bodies must be as free from the stain of these offences, as they are from their natural soil, when washed and cleansed with pure water; or in the Apostle's language, we must *purify ourselves from all impurity both of the flesh and spirit*. The body, the person, thus purified from all irrational brutal passions, and cleansed from all its former defilements, becomes in some measure an offering fit to be presented to God. Especially

2. When it not only partakes of this *negative* purity and holiness, but is *consecrated* to the *practice of universal righteousness*, and employed in all suitable instances of obedience to God. For thus the Apostle adds †: *Be ye not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God*. When *we yield ourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead*, and the members of our bodies, as *instruments of righteous-*

* Ver. 2.

† Ver. 2.

ness unto God; when we have consecrated ourselves to God for these sacred purposes, and the after part of life is spent in services suitable to such a solemn consecration of ourselves to God; then we truly do honour to ourselves, cloath even our bodies with a real sanctity and dignity, render them fit for, and capable of becoming the temples of God, and cannot fail through the mediation of our blessed Lord, of being approved and graciously regarded by him. 'Tis therefore no wonder the Apostle adds farther,

3. That this will render the sacrifice of ourselves to God, an *offering well pleasing and acceptable* before him. *Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.* And it is so in the *nature of the thing*; the moralists among the *heathens* frequently declaring, that mens devoting and consecrating themselves to God, is the best offering that can be presented him; because a man's self is the greatest and most valuable possession that he hath, and that this is the best way of honouring the Deity. And indeed what have we to present more than ourselves? What better can we offer to God, than the homage of our hearts, purified from all unworthy and criminal affections, and the service of our bodies employed in works of devotion, righteousness and charity? And though we have oftentimes many past sins to reflect on, antecedent to our being renewed in the spirit of our minds, and many remaining imperfections after it, sufficient to make us always walk humbly before God; yet the co-
venant

venant of Grace, and the *mediation of Christ* are a full security against the condemnation of the former, and his *advocacy* in heaven will be effectually prevalent to obtain for us the divine favour and acceptance, notwithstanding the latter; so that we have all the certainty we can desire from the reason of the thing, and all the good hope and comfort that we can wish, from the provisions of the gospel covenant, that if we yield ourselves to God, by renouncing the corruptions that are in the world through lust, and becoming holy in our measure as God and Christ are holy, he will accept us graciously and love us freely. I need not use many words to shew you,

4. That the thus presenting ourselves to God, a living, holy, acceptable sacrifice, is our *reasonable service*; a service reasonable in itself, and which therefore our own reason and consciences must be convinced of the necessity and advantage of. The services we are to pay him consists not in rites and ceremonies, bodily exercises, voluntary superstitions, human inventions and ordinances, which have no intrinsic worth and excellency in them; but in those noble and substantial instances of piety and virtue, which are of eternal and immutable obligation, arise out of human nature, are connected with our relations, and suitable to the various circumstances and conditions in which God hath placed us. There is not a single duty we are to practise, relating to God, the Lord Jesus Christ, our neighbour, or ourselves, but what is the dictate of reason,

and which every well informed conscience must approve of. There is not a single disposition we are commanded as Christians to cultivate, not one good affection we are to exercise, not one of the many virtues we are to abound in, but what have a native excellency and dignity in them, appear lovely to the understanding, but what are the children of truth, but what are necessary sources of peace and self-enjoyment, and in their own nature essential to our present and eternal happiness. In a word, the exhortation of my text, which is comprehensive of the whole of Christian piety and duty, of presenting ourselves to God, as living, holy, acceptable sacrifices, is the exhortation of truth and reason themselves. For whose property are we but God's, who hath the rights of Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, and Redeemer centering in himself, rights supream, and unalienable and eternal, that can never be lessened, never superseded, never cease. And therefore by presenting and consecrating ourselves to him, we only present him what is his own, and what it is the highest sacrilege and impiety ever to alienate from him. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* But this brings me to the

II. General, which is in a few words to consider the manner, and powerful motive, by which the Apostle enforceth this exhortation: *I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God.* And we may here observe,

I. The

1. The *kind and affectionate character* under which he addresses them. It is that of *brethren*. He wholly lays aside the superior character of an Apostle, and bespeaks them as one upon a level with them, and who desired to be known amongst them, and considered by them in the endearing relation of a brother; even though they were *Gentiles*, and as such *strangers to the covenant of promise, and aliens from Israel*. Though Christianity is not such a levelling scheme, as to destroy the several ranks and subordinations of men, that God and nature have established, and to place all men upon an absolute equality; but supposes a difference of station and character, and commands all persons faithfully to discharge the duties belonging to, and that result from their respective relations and classes; yet as faith in Christ constitutes *all men the children of God, and heirs with Christ* of the heavenly inheritance, it for this reason renders them also *brethren* to each other, and each owes to every one a brotherly affection and love. Brethren in the same family may sustain very different characters, and be some of them in much higher stations, and be engaged in more honourable employments than others of them. And as the brotherly relation doth not take away the obligation on those of inferior rank of paying the respect that is due to those in higher, so neither doth it discharge those of them who are in superior circumstances from the exercise of that fraternal affection and charity to their brethren of in-

ferior condition, which by nature they have a claim to. *St. Paul* was undoubtedly, as an Apostle, immediately inspired and commissioned by God, greatly superior in character and rank to any of those he converted, and might have charged and commanded them by the Lord Jesus Christ to present themselves a living sacrifice to God, and insisted on their obedience to his orders as an Apostle, whom God had commissioned to convert and save them. But he prudently waves the apostolic character, and addresses them as upon a kind of level, and equally the children of God with himself; that hereby he might the more insinuate himself into their affection, and by securing their esteem and love, might the more effectually prevail with them to comply with the exhortation he gave them.

2. As the character in which the Apostle applies to them is condescending and affectionate, so the *manner* of the address is tender and engaging. But of this in the next discourse.

S E R-

S E R M O N XIV.

A Persuasive to present ourselves to
G O D.

R O M. xii. 1.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

W H E N the reason of our minds directs us in our conduct, we cannot but approve it; and one would think and hope there could be no need of any farther argument to persuade and determine us to such a behaviour; and as the whole service of religion, which is comprehended in the *presenting our bodies to God*, is in every part *reasonable*, it should be our chosen and delightful service. Our minds, and our bodies, by which we execute the purposes of the mind, are equally the property of God, who is the creator of both; and should therefore be *presented* to him: *i. e.* We should very seriously *acknowledge* his supream interest in us, voluntarily
S 4 and

and chearfully *submit* ourselves to him to be governed by his authority, and *employ* the powers of our minds, and the members of our bodies, so as to keep them *pure* from the defilements of sin, and make them *subservient* to all the purposes of real and universal *righteousness*, in conformity to his good and acceptable and perfect will. And the thus presenting ourselves to him, as it is thus highly reasonable in itself, so it is offering him a sacrifice, that will be well pleasing and *acceptable* to him; which is the highest *honour* we can be ambitious of, and will secure us, through Christ, every kind and degree of real *happiness*, we can desire or enjoy. And this consecration of ourselves as an holy, acceptable sacrifice to God, the Apostle enforces by a very warm and affecting exhortation.

And as the *character* in which he applies to them is *condescending* and *affectionate*, so the *manner* in which he addresses them is *tender* and *engaging*. *I beseech you, brethren.* He had a right to speak to them in a more *authoritative* stile, and we find him sometimes using it to enforce the directions he gave; for on particular occasions he exhorts, and charges and commands, as one who spoke in the *name of Christ*, and by his immediate authority. But he generally uses the less imperious manner, and as one that knew mankind, and how more ingenuous tempers were to be dealt with, addresses himself to the more humane passions, and strives to win them over to their duty and interest, by engaging the more
pleasing

pleasing and ductile affections in the cause of true religion and goodness. He *beseeches* them, as though he was asking a favour of them for himself, instead of intreating them to do what God required of them, and what the regard to their own eternal happiness obliged them to perform. And this method of dealing with mankind is in its nature affecting and persuasive. It shews the tenderest regard for the welfare of the persons to whom the application is made, and they cannot help conceiving a very high opinion of the friendship and benevolent disposition of one, who in this delicate manner presses them to regard his admonitions, and to do what their former habits and dispositions may create some reluctance to, even though their better judgments may be convinced of the reasonableness of doing it. And this opinion of another's friendship is itself a very powerful motive to follow his advice, and yield to the exhortation that he gives us.

This way of addressing men is also well suited to the nature and spirit of the *gospel*, which supposes men *reasonable* and intelligent agents, possessed with a proper degree of *liberty*, capable of consideration, of forming a proper judgment of the nature of things, and discerning the propriety and fitness and intrinsic goodness of the gospel exhortations, and the truth and importance of those principles and motives, by which alone these exhortations can be powerfully and effectually enforced. Men seldom love to be
com-

compelled to any thing by bare authority, to be driven by arbitrary command, or to be forced by threatenings and the mere terror of penalties, and the spirit of the *gospel* is a spirit of *freedom*. Christ's people are a *willing people*, and when the sheep follow this heavenly shepherd, they do it voluntarily, because they *know his voice*, they understand his call, and have the fullest, firmest, conviction 'tis the invitation of a friend, who knows their true interest, and will lead them into no paths but those of safety and happiness. To this spirit of the *gospel* the affectionate intreaty, the tender beseeching, is perfectly suitable, as it is free from every thing of an overbearing, authoritative, imposing disposition, supposes persons masters of their own actions, is a kind of appeal to their understandings and judgments, to their own convictions and consciences, that what they are exhorted to is right in itself, and of the utmost importance and necessity to their true welfare and happiness.

And let me farther add, that this affectionate manner of address by intreaty and tender persuasion, is peculiarly suitable to the nature of the *gospel exhortations*, as well as to the spirit of liberty that runs through the whole of it. The exhortation of my text is a very important and interesting one, and 'tis impossible it can be complied with by compulsion and force, or as the effect of mere power and authority. *Present yourselves to God*, is an exhortation that carries in the very face

face of it choice, voluntary consent, conviction of judgment, and a full persuasion that such a consecration of ourselves to God, is what he requires, deserves, and will approve of; what we ought to do in duty and interest, and, in a word, that it is a *reasonable service*. To beseech men to do this is humane, rational, and affecting, is an address equally to their judgments and passions, carries conviction and persuasion, implies and tacitly insinuates the danger of refusing it, intimates the propriety, the absolute necessity and unspeakable advantage of the thing, and when urged in an affair of the utmost consequence with men, will have some good effect with ingenuous minds, and may win the consent, where a different manner of address may be rejected as unbecoming and unnatural. O that I could find words, suitable to the affections and sentiments of my own heart towards you, to intreat and beseech you this day, to present yourselves to God, as a living, holy sacrifice. Many reflections occur to my mind on such a subject, but as there is no consideration more powerful and affecting to enforce such an intreaty, than that of my text, let us

3. In the next place consider the *weight* and *force* of that *consideration*, by which he *beseeches* them to *present themselves to God*. *I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God*. He uses the word in the plural number, *Mercies*, either to denote the exceeding *greatness* of the divine mercy, or those *many* instances of the
grace

grace and compassion of God, that they had experienced by their conversion to the faith, and introduction into the church of Christ. The mercies he particularly refers to are those, which he had represented to them in the foregoing part of this Epistle. In the chapter immediately preceding my text, he speaks of *salvation being come to the Gentiles* †, and of the goodness of God to them, as they were by *faith ingrafted into the olive tree*, and with the natural branches made *partakers of the root and fatness of it* ||, and of their having *obtained mercy from God*, notwithstanding they were originally as much unbelievers, as any of those *Jews* whom God rejected for their impenitence and infidelity. And in what this salvation consisted, and what were the inestimable fruits and effects of this goodness and mercy of God towards them, he largely explains by telling them, that though Gentiles, *they were justified by faith* § in the blood of Christ, *God having commended his love to them, in that whilst they were yet sinners Christ died for them, and that by being justified by his blood, they should be saved from wrath through him* *, were brought into a state of *peace with God*, had the *love of God shed abroad in their hearts*, had received *the spirit of adoption* ††, bearing witness to them that they were the *children of God*, and if *children then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*, ‡‡ *that all things should work together for their good, and that nothing*

† Ver. 11. || Ver. 17. § Rom. v. 1, 8. * Rom. v. 9.
 †† Rom. viii. 15, 16, 17. ‡‡ Rom. viii. 28, 35.

should be able to separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Let but any one pass a right and impartial judgment on these things, and he cannot but acknowledge them to be the greatest instances of the divine compassion and mercy; since considering ourselves as *sinners* against God, unworthy of his favour, and obnoxious to the condemnation of death, as the effect of his displeasure; it is not possible for the whole creation to bestow upon us blessings so suitable to our wants, so essential to our happiness, and of that importance in their nature, as freedom from the condemnation of sin, entire reconciliation to God, the being constituted heirs with the Son of God himself, the redemption of our bodies from the power of death and the grave, and an unchangeable, everlasting interest in the love of God, as our father, and our portion and exceeding great reward. Well therefore might our Apostle urge these inestimable mercies of God in Christ in order to engage them to present themselves to him, as an holy, living, acceptable, reasonable sacrifice. And his beseeching them thus to do, by these mercies of God, is as if he had said:

1. You have now some *knowledge*, and if you have a real *belief* of the exceeding greatness of *the mercies of God*, and of your own obligations to him upon account of them, *present yourselves to him*, an holy sacrifice. The nature of the intreaty supposes they had been well informed, how these mercies of God had

had been displayed; otherwise they could never be urged as a motive to enforce it. And indeed the very preaching of the gospel of God is the preaching of that good news, which God sent to a sinful world by the Lord Jesus Christ; the good news of the *remission of sins* upon repentance, of *justification by faith in Christ's* blood, as the propitiation for sin, and of the *resurrection to eternal life*, as the reward of perseverance in the faith and obedience of Christ. These were the very first principles embraced by every convert of Christianity; and our Apostle, previous to the exhortation of my text, largely describes these instances of God's mercy, that the entreaty might be more efficacious and effectual. And you have, Christians, every one of you, the same account of these mercies of God, that the converted *Romans* had; for you have the very *letter* which *St. Paul* sent to them for their information; and if you are unacquainted with the great instances of the divine compassion, as manifested in and by Christ, 'tis not because *you cannot*, but because *you will not*, understand them; for God hath made known to *us* by the gospel revelation the great and unsearchable riches of Christ, and that *he is in him reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them that believe*. Do we then know these things and believe them? What sentiments do they awaken in our hearts? Doth the manifestation of God's infinite mercies excite no answerable affection within us? Do they suggest nothing as matter of

our duty? Do they call for no suitable returns from us, who are immediately interested in, and made partakers of them; and can any sentiments and returns be more natural and becoming us, than those of affection, self-devotedness, and consecration of our entire persons to that God, whom we know to be *rich in mercy*, whose compassions we have so largely experienced, and in the blessed fruits of whose grace we hope eternally to share? If we experience nothing of these effects, though we profess to believe the gospel accounts of the abundant mercies of God in Christ, it must be owing to our want of *serious and frequent consideration* of them, and duly impressing them upon our hearts and consciences.

It is a lively sense of obligation that must awaken strong and prevailing purposes of obedience, and the favours of God must be frequently recollected, and habitually present to our minds, in order to render them effectual motives to our *approving* and doing *his good and acceptable and perfect will*. The holy Psalmist charges it upon himself ‡: *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits*. These were the daily subjects of his meditation, and employed his thoughts every morning and evening ||. *How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!* the thoughts of those innumerable blessings thou hast conferred upon me! *How great is the sum of them!* If I

‡ Psal. ciii. 2.

|| Psal. cxxxix. 17, 18.

should

should count them they are more in number than the sand. When I awake I am still with thee. Thy mercies employ my waking thoughts, and though I am continually recounting them, their number is too great ever to be summed up. And it was under the influence of this grateful sense of his obligations to God, that he abhorred the practices of those who were the enemies of God, and earnestly prays to him, that *God would search and try him*, deliver him from every evil way, and enable him to walk in the paths of righteousness, that hath its foundation in eternal and immutable truth. And are the *mercies of God in Christ*, less valuable than those which the Psalmist experienced? Do they not deserve to be as frequently recollected, and will they not serve the purposes of true piety and goodness? But farther,

2. *I beseech you by the mercies of God*, is not only putting them in mind of the rich grace and compassion of God towards them, in making them partakers of redemption by Christ, and appealing to them as those who knew and believed the inestimable effects of them; but it is an *appeal to their gratitude*, intended to excite it, and interest that powerful affection of the mind, in support of the exhortation which he gives them to *present themselves to God*. This was what the Apostle's heart was set upon, to persuade them to yield themselves an *acceptable, living, sacrifice to God*, as he knew it was necessary to their obtaining the blessings of the gospel salvation, and to render

render his ministry of any avail to their eternal happiness; and therefore as he had informed them, how and in what instances these mercies of God had been manifested towards them, he intreats and presses them by their obligations upon account of them, by that affection and high esteem which the recollection of them should create, and by that thankful disposition which it became them to cherish towards him, to *yield themselves servants of righteousness unto God*, and employ their bodies as sacred instruments of obedience to his will. And is not *gratitude*, in a rightly tempered mind, an *excellent and worthy principle* of action? Is there not a defect in humanity itself, where there is a want of a grateful spirit? Doth not the acting contrary to what gratitude demands, fix the most criminal and detestable imputation? And is not the warmest gratitude due, where the highest benefits have been conferred, and where every circumstance unites to render the manner of conferring them affecting and engaging? Look over, Christian, the blessings of redemption by Christ Jesus, consider their nature, their number and importance; and see if they are not demonstrations of the highest benevolence and compassion to a sinful world. How could the mercy of God have discovered itself in a more glorious manner, than in rescuing thee from the eternal condemnation of sin and death, in reversing the forfeitures thou hast incurred of life and happiness, and in giving thee the promise, and raising

thee to the hope of a blessed and glorious immortality? And are there no charms in goodness like this, infinitely great, and on thy part absolutely undeserved? Are there no attractives in mercy, exerting itself to soul and body, for time and eternity; saving thee from the most complicated misery, and offering thee a salvation the most extensive, consummate and durable?

Shouldst thou in circumstances of extream poverty find a *friend* willing and desirous to place thee in a state of great affluence and plenty, and to deliver thee from the most threatening destruction, or when perishing by a fatal distemper, to restore thee to thy health, or should *thy prince* offer thee when condemned to death for thy offences, his grace, tender thee thy pardon, restore thee to the full privileges of a subject, and by peculiar goodness assure thee, that if thou wilt return to thy allegiance and duty, he will distinguish thee by his friendship, and consider and treat thee as one of his household and family: What would be the natural sentiments of the heart in any one of these instances; and especially if we could suppose all these several circumstances to concur in any one single person? Would it not overflow with thankfulness, and almost dissolve with affection and gratitude? Why *thou art the very person*, Christian, in whom all these circumstances concur. Thou art in thyself considered, as a dependent creature, and as an obnoxious sinner, destitute, liable to misery, corrupted and diseased, and doomed

to destruction for the transgressions, with which thou art chargeable; and *God* is that infinitely benevolent *friend* of thine, who offers thee mercy, and is willing to save thee from every destruction that threatens thee, from every evil thou can'st dread, and from every condemnation thou hast rendered thyself worthy of. And is there no gratitude due to him? Doth thy heart meditate no returns for such amazing instances of compassion and goodness? What return wouldst thou make him, and which thy conscience tells thee he deserves and requires? There is but one, which *God* asks, and which thou canst give, that is any way worthy his acceptance. 'Tis thyself; the fear, the affection, the esteem and subjection of thy heart, that thy body should be employed in the service he hath prescribed thee, and that as thou art his by an original and unalienable right, thou shouldest cheerfully own thyself his property, and as such consent to be governed by his will. And *God* expects this return, not for any advantage that we, or our services can be to himself; but because our subjection to him is our own interest, and obedience to his will the only possible method that can secure our true happiness. So that even *God's* demanding our submission to himself is an act of real mercy to us, and should be complied with from a sense of gratitude as well as duty.

I persuade myself, Christian, thou art no stranger to the grace of the gospel. Thou hast heard, thou hast read of, thou hast be-

lieved the reports of a divine revelation, concerning the amazing condescension and goodness of God, as they have been displayed in the method of thy redemption, by his only and well beloved Son Jesus Christ. He came as the messenger of his Father's grace and peace, to reveal the eternal counsels of his wisdom and mercy, in favour of a sinful world, involved in guilt, alienated from him in disposition and practice, and under a sentence of condemnation and death, which it was not in the power of the whole creation to reverse; and under which therefore we must have eternally remained, had not he, from the mere motives of compassion, determined to save us. He offers us by Christ eternal redemption from this dreadful destruction; he beseeches us to accept of the forgiveness of our sins, and to be reconciled to himself. He gives us the prospect and choice of glory, honour and immortality, and of happiness compleat in itself, without interruption, and end of duration. Was ever goodness like this? Did ever mercy discover itself in such rich and valuable effects as these? This is indeed divine benevolence! This is love to men, worthy the infinitely perfect God, and the eternal fountain of good! And doth the consideration of this awaken no ingenuous sentiments in our minds? Create no returns of affection and gratitude to him, to whom we are so unspeakably beholden? If we have that love to God, which the sense of his benefits should excite in us, constrained by the
powerful

powerful attraction of it, we shall immediately yield ourselves to him, to be employed in those sacred duties, which he hath commanded, as a testimony of our affection and obedience to him; and say with the same spirit and resolution as the Psalmist did, upon a review of what God had done for him: *O Lord, truly I am thy servant. I am thy servant, for thou hast loosed my bonds.* Happy, for ever happy, are they, who enter into this sacred engagement, and who mindful of their obligations, continue under the power of gratitude and love, *stedfast and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.* Again,

3. *I beseech you by the mercies of God, that ye present yourselves a living, holy, acceptable sacrifice to him,* means: I beseech you, as you would answer the great intention of God in the manifestation of his mercy, and comply with the design of that grace he hath abounded in towards sinners, in their redemption by Jesus Christ. Even the very goodness of God is not exercised in so sovereign and arbitrary a manner, as not to be under the direction of wisdom, as not to subserve some valuable end and purpose, worthy the divine purity and rectitude, and conducive to the views of his moral providence and government. The great mercies of God, manifested in Christ, are expressly declared to have such an intention, and no man, who hath any knowledge of the gospel revelation, can possibly be ignorant of what the intention is. The intreaty of my text, evidently shews, that the improvement

the *Roman* converts were to make of the discoveries of the mercies of God towards them, was their willingly *presenting themselves an holy sacrifice to God*; for it would have been absurd to have pressed them to this by a motive that carried in it no manner of reason for doing it; and as the *gift of Christ* to be the *propitiation for the sins of men*, was the great instance of the divine compassion and mercy to them; the exhortation which the Apostle grounds upon it, is: *Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your body, and in your spirit, which are God's* †. And in his instructions to Titus, he informs him, *that the grace or mercy of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works* †. In a word, the whole doctrine of the grace and mercy of God, in the gospel revelation, hath a moral tendency and intention, that of *reconciling men to God*, rendering them *partakers of his holiness*, and persuading them to *yield themselves to him*, and acknowledge themselves to be what they really are, his property, and as such to make his *good and perfect and acceptable will*, the rule of their conduct through the whole of their lives.

† 1 Cor. vi. 20.

† Tit. ii. 11—14.

Now if God hath manifested the riches of his mercy to us to promote this design, and more effectually to carry on this sacred purpose; how strong and engaging is the motive arising from the consideration of God's mercies, to consecrate ourselves to him, and employ our bodies in all those services of righteousness, to which such a devotedness of ourselves to him obliges us! In the displays of mercy God must, in the nature of things, be entirely free, and can have nothing to direct him but his own wisdom and pleasure. The terms on which he will extend mercy are in his own breast, and he hath a right to fix them, and insist upon a compliance with them. And as those which he fixes cannot but be wise and good, fit for him to appoint, and conducive to our happiness to submit to; it is unreasonable, ungrateful and impious, in us to dispute them, or refuse our acceptance of them. If after the discovery of these riches of divine mercy, they have no kindly effect upon us, and the great purpose of such a manifestation be not answered in us, we do what we can to frustrate the very intention of them, and to render the counsels and purposes of God of none effect. And if we apply them to quite different purposes, and instead of being persuaded by them to yield ourselves to God, we encourage ourselves, by the consideration of them, to alienate ourselves more entirely from him, by a thorough conformity to the sinful practices of a degenerate world, and a course of habitual disobedience to his will;

this is in truth the most outrageous insult upon the mercies of God in Christ, and the most criminal abuse that can be offered to his grace. And therefore,

4. Lastly, there is unquestionably another thing implied in this *intreaty by the mercies of God, to present themselves to him, as an holy sacrifice*, and that is: I beseech you, as you would *secure an interest in them*, and would not finally forfeit all the unspeakable advantages and blessings, the hope of which they inspire, There is such a thing, Christians, as *receiving the grace of God in vain*, and being counted unworthy of the mercy of God to eternal life. Every man will not obtain mercy, who indulges the hope of it; no, nor any man, who hath not the *disposition and character*, that fits him for it. He who is *alienated from God*, by an unbelieving, impure heart, and a course of sensuality and criminal indulgence, hath, whilst in that state, no lot in Christ, no portion in the grace of the gospel, no foundation of hope in all the rich discoveries of the mercy of God. If he allows himself to place any confidence in, and take any comfort from them; it is the presumption of ignorance and folly, and the groundless flattery of self-delusion and imposture. Thou art, Christian, the property of God, whether thou wilt own and submit to it, or not, and if thou estrankest thyself from him, thou *for-sakest thy own mercies*, and even infinite goodness will not save thee, if thou wilt obstinately walk

walk in the paths that lead to destruction. God calls on thee, to *present thyself* to him an *holy, living sacrifice*; and to persuade thee to make this offering, he assures thee that he is *rich in mercy*, and full of grace; and tenders to thine acceptance, blessings of that infinite importance, and endless duration, as abundantly prove the greatness of his affection towards thee, and his compassionate regards for thy best interest and highest happiness. *Yield thyself to God*, and his mercies shall never forsake thee, shall compass about all thy paths, shall afford the noblest consolation to thy mind, shall relieve thee under the sense of sin and guilt, shall revive thee in the prospect of death, and render the nearest views of eternity pleasing and delightful. *Abide with God*, and every thing that infinite, unchangeable mercy can do for thee, to prevent thy ruin, and secure thee everlasting blessedness, instantly becomes the object of thy reasonable, and never to be disappointed, expectation. Oh! how happy is the man who is in such a state, and who can say upon the express warrant of divine revelation, not only, though it is a great thing to say even this, *that goodness and mercy shall follow me all my days*, but that *I shall share the noblest effects* of the divine mercy, throughout the innumerable ages of *eternity*! But if instead of such an adherence to God, and consecration of ourselves to his service, manifested by a fixed approbation of and submission to his will,

will, we continue in a state of enmity to him by wicked works, and *yield ourselves the servants of unrighteousness to sin*; in such a state what have we to do with the covenant of God, or what good foundation of hope from all the discoveries of his abundant mercy? The abuse of mercy is a crime of the most aggravated nature, argues the very worst kind of ingratitude, and, if continued in, seals up the person to irrevocable condemnation. Mercy cannot exert itself, upon an object *incapable* of mercy, and he, who will not be persuaded to be *reconciled to God*, cannot, in the nature of things, be *interested* in him, as his reconciled God and Father. And, therefore, if ever we make the mercies of God the foundation of our hope, and would not have that hope finally and dreadfully disappoint us, the consideration of them must have this effect and influence upon us, even to persuade us to *devote* ourselves to his fear, and *serve him in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of our lives*.

I know well, that 'tis a much easier thing to shew, and even convince men of the *reasonableness* of thus presenting themselves to God, than effectually to *persuade* them to do it. The corrupt habits they have contracted, the sensual passions and affections they have indulged and strengthened, and the perpetual practice and example of the generality of the world, all bias the contrary way, lead men off from God, disaffect them to that submission

mission which he requires, and strongly solicit them, either to cast contempt on God's mercy, or make themselves easy by the most precarious and groundless expectations of it. How difficult is it for the most earnest intreaties, and the warmest exhortations to prevail, where they are opposed and counteracted by such powerful and insidious solicitors to the contrary! But still, as persuasion is God's appointed method to reclaim sinners, and recover them to their submission and duty to him; as the Apostles themselves were to beseech and pray men in Christ's stead and name to be reconciled to God; and as this is the utmost length that the gospel ministry can go, to lay before them their interest and duty, and to press and intreat them to present and consecrate themselves to God, by the most powerful arguments and motives, that reason and revelation can suggest: *Suffer the word of exhortation*, and let me conclude this subject, by arguing with you from the consideration of God's mercies, to own his right in you, and subject yourselves to his authority and will, and henceforward live as those who are consecrated to his fear. And if my wishes and prayers could prevail, there is not one of you should go out of this assembly, without saying: "Won over, " O God, by the consideration of thy infinite " goodness and mercy, I acknowledge myself thy property, and this day yield myself to thy government, fully determined, " by

“by thy grace, on such a life of chearful
 “and universal obedience, as shall be the
 “strongest proof of my inviolable attach-
 “ment to thy interest and government.”

And here,

I promise myself, that I am speaking to persons, who have some due *knowledge* of the riches of God's mercies, as they have been revealed in the gospel, and the glorious fruits and evidences of the divine grace, as they appear in the provisions made for our eternal salvation, through the redemption that is in Christ. I cannot reasonably suppose, that with the gospel in your hands, and notwithstanding your stated attendences on the institutions of worship, and the means of instruction, you are entirely, or in great measure ignorant of what God hath done to convince you, that he is *merciful and gracious*; and how, that *after the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared to us, according to his mercy he saved us, that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life* *. But what signifies it to have heard of these things by the hearing of the ear, or to have gained a *merely speculative* acquaintance with them, that never produces any good and valuable effect? Faith and knowledge are of no consequence in Christianity, any farther than as they *purify the heart*, and form those who have them into

* Tit. iii. 4, 5, 7.

the divine nature and life. If my *knowledge* was equal to that of the highest *Seraph* in heaven, and absolutely without error, and if *I had faith so that I could remove mountains*, yet if I continue an enemy to God, cherish those sinful passions which alienate the heart from him, and abound in those evil works which are the certain marks of a settled apostacy and departure from him; in such a state, can the soundness of my knowledge avail me, or the strength of my faith save me? If *I believe in God*, I believe in him as God *my creator, absolute proprietor, and sovereign Lord and Master*; and therefore, in consequence, I believe, that he hath a *right* to direct and govern me, and that 'tis *my duty* to own his right, and render him the best subjection of my heart and life. If *I believe in Christ*, I believe that *he died for us, that we should not henceforth live to ourselves, but unto him who died for us, and rose again for our justification*. But now will it do us any good thus to believe in God and Christ, and yet act in *defiance* of it? To be persuaded in our minds, that God claims and deserves our subjection and obedience, and yet to declare aloud by our actions that he hath no right to govern us, and that we will never submit to his authority? To boast of the *excellency of the knowledge of Christ*, and to behave towards him, as though we knew him not, or counted the knowledge of him contemptible and unworthy our regard? To profess our faith in
him,

him, as having *redeemed us by his blood from all iniquity*, and yet by yielding ourselves servants to iniquity, to *trample* that sacred blood as it were under our feet, and treat it as of no worth, and carrying no powerful constraints to gratitude and obedience? If, Christians, you are *acquainted* with the grace of God, let me persuade you, *not to receive that grace in vain*, not to abuse it, and thereby declare yourselves unworthy of the mercy of God to eternal life.

Let me farther *reason* with you from the *avowed end and design of the mercies of God*, as they are revealed in the gospel. If there are any who imagine that God hath discovered the riches of his grace to sinful men, to *quiet* their consciences, without *cleansing them from dead works to serve the living God*; to encourage the hope of God's acceptance, without reconciling them to his authority and government; or that the blood of Christ can cleanse them from the guilt of sin, without purifying their hearts from the impurity and love, and saving them from the practice of it; such persons absolutely *deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them* †. They receive another gospel than that which Christ and his Apostles preached; for their gospel teaches us: *That whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin*, but that *the Son of God and his truth makes us free* ‡, and that this is indeed freedom, the noblest

† John viii. 32.

‡ Ver. 34, 36.

and

and most valuable freedom, which as reasonable creatures we can be made partakers of; and that our Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world §, all the corruptions and crimes of it, according to the will of God; as those who know, that inasmuch as Christ died, he died unto sin once, and in that he liveth, he liveth unto God, that we should reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God by Jesus Christ *, and be persuaded to yield ourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God ||. Are we then persuaded, that the manifestation of the grace and mercy of God in Christ is made with this salutary view, and original intention, that we should yield ourselves servants of God, have our fruit unto holiness, and for ever renounce the dominion and service of sin? Can there be a better reason than this, for our chearful compliance with this great and avowed design of the divine goodness? Should we not be effectually prevailed with to enter ourselves amongst those wise and faithful servants of God, who are devoted to his fear? Can we improve the grace of God to better purposes than those, which God himself hath assured us, he intended to promote by it? Or dare we really hope for an interest in that mercy of God, which we refuse to improve to those purposes,

§ Galat. i. 4.

* Rom. vi. 10, 11.

|| Ver. 13.

which

which are the reasons why God hath encouraged the expectations of it? Did ever a *wise prince* make the offers of mercy to rebellious subjects, but as a motive to return to their allegiance and duty? Or would any of you who are *parents* tender forgiveness and reconciliation to an offending son, without designing to engage him to filial submission and obedience for the future? And can we ever persuade ourselves to think, that God, the greatest and wisest of beings, would make the fullest discoveries, and give the most friendly promises of mercy and grace to sinners, without intending to promote the honour of his own government, and prevail with sinful men to renounce their crimes, and yield him a better obedience for the future? Especially, can we entertain such a thought, after he hath expressly assured us, that *he sent his Son to bless us, by turning us every one from our iniquities, and hath chosen us in Christ, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love*? If this therefore be the professed intention of God, in causing all his goodness and mercy to pass before us, let me beseech you by the mercy of God, not to *frustrate* the intention of it, nor ever to *pervert* and *abuse* it to purposes that are subversive of, and absolutely inconsistent with the most evident and certain views of the divine rectitude and wisdom, in the whole scheme of redemption, and all the displays of his compassion and goodness towards us.

Farther,

Farther, do we know any thing of the working of an ingenuous *gratitude* in our hearts? Have we ever felt any thing of that disposition, which always arises in good minds, under the sense of great obligations conferred, and numerous favours vouchsafed, even without any claim of merit; blessings of the highest importance in their nature, and which, however necessary to our real welfare, we could have no reason to expect from the generous hand that bestows them. Or, if it had been possible for us to have loaded any person with such kind of benefits, should we not have expected the most ingenuous disposition of mind, in a gratitude answerable to such obligations, and in a conduct that should be a substantial proof, and highly expressive of that esteem and affection we should justly think was so much deserved by us? Determine, Christians, for yourselves in this case, what you would judge *you* were entitled to from *another*, and you will then determine what *God* is entitled to from *you*, and what the return you ought to make him for the mercy he hath shewn you; and if you deservedly condemn another for flagrant and wilful ingratitude to yourselves, you will thereby condemn yourselves for the like instances of ingratitude to God. 'Tis impossible that any one who thinks seriously a single moment, can ever persuade himself to think, that he is not indebted, nor under any obligations to the blessed God; and he who under-

stands any thing of the nature of the Christian revelation must immediately acknowledge, that God hath given the utmost proofs of his benevolence and compassion to sinful men, by the promises he hath given them, by the hopes to which he hath raised them, and the doctrine, life, death, resurrection and mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ, his only and well beloved Son; and all the peculiar blessings of redemption are as much more valuable, than all the blessings that relate merely to the present life, as the immortal soul is to the dying body, and eternity is of more consequence to us than time. Hence nothing can appear with stronger conviction, than that if gratitude be due from us to others, it must be in an especial manner due to God, and in an higher measure and degree than what any other being whatsoever can expect and deserve; and that if benefits conferred be the foundation of gratitude, the gratitude should bear a proportion to the nature and number of the blessings conferred; and that as the blessings we owe to the mercies of God in Christ, are the most valuable and durable that can be wished or obtained, we owe to him the most fervent gratitude which our hearts are capable of exercising and cherishing.

Let it not therefore, Christians, be said of any of us, that we know how to resent benefits conferred on us by mortal men; but that we are destitute of all just sense of those

more

more valuable ones conferred on us by the eternal God; that we think it a shame to be chargeable with ingratitude to an earthly benefactor, and no dishonour to us to be guilty of this unnatural crime to our heavenly one. If therefore *gratitude* is a right disposition in its nature, and it be due in the highest degree to the blessed God, let me *beseech* you by his *great* mercy, and that warm gratitude you owe to God upon account of it, to offer him that sacrifice which he calls for from you, by yielding yourselves, in obedience to his will, to the practice of universal righteousness, since you have nothing better to present him, and since he will accept nothing less at your hands.

Consider farther, what will the *consequence* finally be, if we are *obstinate* against all the persuasives of mercy, and will not be won over by all the instances of the divine goodness, to acknowledge his right in us, and heartily consent to his authority and government over us! What must succeed, if mercy be rejected, and the love of God in Christ will not powerfully and effectually constrain us! *Nothing can remain*, in the nature of the thing, but some *fearful expectation of judgment*, and *fiery indignation*, which shall hereafter *consume the adversaries*. There is not a more dangerous mistake, that men can fall into, than the imagination that God is *all* mercy and goodness, that he is not so much displeased with sin as to *resent* it, and shew his

hatred of it by the *punishments* of a future state, or that he sent his Son into the world by his all perfect righteousness to *free* men from the *practice* of it, and to bear the punishment of our sins, that we might *continue in the love and practice* of them, without suffering ourselves at last the punishment due to them. These are mistakes subversive of the whole scheme of the gospel, and as for those who act upon these mistaken principles, it cannot but be to their final destruction. For God never acts under the direction of any one single perfection, as opposed to another; but as an infinitely perfect Being, infinitely wise and just and good; and as sin is necessarily his hatred, because of the direct contrariety it carries to the rectitude of his nature, and the best and wisest ends of his government, 'tis impossible that goodness can prevent the exercise of this hatred of God towards that which is the necessary object of it, or those effects which naturally arise from it. If therefore men will continue the servants of sin, they can never obtain the divine approbation. If they alienate themselves from their allegiance to him, they cannot share the happy fruits of fidelity and good obedience. If they are real enemies to God by wicked works, they must be treated as enemies; and if the mercy and goodness of God will not prevail with them to present themselves to him as holy sacrifices, which is but their reasonable service, the effect will be an heavier displeasure, in proportion
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to the greatness of the mercy despised, and the importance and value of that salvation which they reject, and *count themselves unworthy of*. Let me therefore beseech you to remember, how *dreadful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God*, and *persuade you by his mercies*, as you would not finally forfeit all interest in them, and expose yourselves by an abuse of them, to a more aggravated condemnation, immediately to reconcile yourselves to God by faith, repentance and new obedience, to own his right in you, and act as those who from their hearts acknowledge it. For

In the last place consider, how *happy the condition* of those is, who by thus *presenting themselves to God*, have secured an interest in him, *are accepted of him*, and become the objects of his peculiar favour. Have we been prevailed with by the gospel intreaties, to consecrate ourselves, the powers and passions of our minds, and the members and actions of our bodies, to be exercised and employed according to the will of God, in the services of righteousness? Then are we under the *best and wisest conduct* and direction, we have *infinite power to protect us*, *never-failing goodness to supply us*, *unchangeable mercy to forgive us*, and *an eternity of happiness and glory to reward us*. Our service is honourable, our peace of mind secure, our hopes well grounded, our death will be safe, and *God himself our portion and exceeding great reward*. To him, therefore,

let us renew our vows of obedience this day,
yield ourselves entirely to God, and live mindful
 of those sacred vows that are upon us, that
adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour with
 all the fruits of an exemplary piety and virtue,
 we may be hereafter solemnly and publicly
 owned as *good and faithful servants*, and may
 finally have our admision with them into
 that kingdom of glory, *which God hath pre-*
pared for all those who love him, from before the
foundatin of the world.



S.E.R.

S E R M O N XV.

The Nature of Charity.

I TIM. i. 5.

Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart and a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.

WHEN St. Paul left *Ephesus*, upon occasion of the riot that had been raised against him, for preaching the gospel by *Demetrius* * and his brother craftsmen, he left his companion and friend *Timothy* behind him in that city, to watch the conduct of certain persons there, and *charge them to teach no other doctrine, viz.* than that which the Apostle himself had taught the *Ephesian* converts; and that they should *not give heed to fables and endless genealogies*; not pay any regard to them themselves, nor, blending them with the doctrines of Christianity, persuade others to hearken to and believe them†. For these things

* Ver. 3.

† The Jews were in general extremely fond of traditions, and paid greater attention and respect to the *oral* than the *written* law. Some of these traditions were extremely fabulous and

things as the Apostle says *ministered questions, rather than godly edifying, which is by faith, i. e.* tended rather to engage them in unprofitable disputes and controversies, that were never to be decided, than to build them up and establish them in the genuine principles of the Christian faith. With these sort of things *real Christianity* hath nothing to do. It is quite of another nature, and the design of it, is not to enter men into long and perplexing debates about difficult speculations and intricate questions; but to promote in them *goodness* of disposition, *purity* of heart, and that pleasing *testimony of conscience*, which is created by a steady perseverance in piety and virtue, as the

incredible. The *Talmudic* writers have collected a large number of them, relating to the creation the law, several remarkable persons mentioned in scripture, *Adam, Eve, Abraham, Moses*, and others; the *Angels*, the *fall* of our first parents, and other matters, which are so *romantic and extravagant*, as only deserve laughter and contempt; but which, as they were several of them calculated to do *honour* to the *Jewish nation and law*, the *Jews* and *Judaizing Christians* seem to have been extremely fond of, and propagated wherever they had the power and opportunity.

Besides, they had their *genealogies, i. e.* their *pedigrees*, in a long train of succession from father to son, from *Abraham* and *David*, down to their own times, on which they boasted themselves as more honourably descended than other nations, but which must, in the nature of the thing, from their frequent disjunctions, and the loss of their genealogical tables, be oftentimes extremely *uncertain*, and liable to great altercation and dispute; and which therefore the Apostle calls *endless*, because the disputes about them were such, as could never be determined.

Or, he may refer to the *persons* from whom they pretended to derive their *traditions*, beginning from *Josbua*, and so down from him in a continued series to their own times, which was a much more *uncertain* and *disputable* thing than the *genealogies* of their families.

effect of an *unfeigned faith*, or of a firm belief of the great principles and doctrines of the gospel of Christ. For as it follows in my text: *The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.* The commandment which the Apostle here speaks of is that commandment which he gave to *Timothy*, relating to the gospel doctrine, and of which he had spoken before †, when he tells him: That *he left him at Ephesus, that he might charge or command some, that they should teach no other doctrine than what he had taught and received from the Lord Jesus Christ.* Now the end of the command or charge which *Christ* gave the *Apostle*, the *Apostle* gave to *Timothy*, and *Timothy* was to give to the *Ephesians*; the great design and practical view of the whole gospel doctrine is *charity*, or love from a pure heart, a good conscience and faith unfeigned. In speaking to these words

I. I shall consider the *nature* of this *charity*.
And

II. The *proper source* and *genuine attendants* of it.

I. I am to consider the *nature* of that *charity* which is here spoken of. We render the original word by *charity* or *love*, indifferently in our translation. And it is attributed to God and man. And we may very safely affirm,

† Ver. 3.

I. That

1. That one great end and intention of the gospel doctrine is to promote and secure mens love to God; for the *loving God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our might, and with all our strength, is the first and great commandment under the Christian, as well as the Jewish dispensation.* It is the *first commandment* in the reason of the thing itself; since God, who is the most excellent of all beings, and to whom our obligations are prior, more numerous and powerful than they can be to any other being whatsoever, is not only an object worthy our love, but deserving the highest possible affection and love that we can pay him. Now this love of God, as it implies an inward affection of the mind, supposes a proper competent *knowledge* of what he is in himself, of the relations he stands in, and the conduct he observes towards his rational creatures; that his perfections are infinite, that every possible excellence belongs to, and is inseparable from him; that he is the Creator, Father, bountiful and unwearied benefactor, faithful friend, almighty protector, gracious and compassionate Redeemer of mankind; who originally formed them for the most excellent and exalted services, and for the highest and most durable happiness; who upholds them by his power, who protects them by his providence, who provides for them by his incessant goodness, supplies all their real wants for soul and body, bears with their faults, forgives them their sins, vouchsafes them his gracious assistance, and is willing

ing to bestow upon them the blessings of eternal salvation: In a word, that he is the *greatest* and *best* of all beings, the fountain of life, *the giver of every good and perfect gift*, and the eternal and indefectible source of all perfection and blessedness throughout the whole creation.

When the mind *considers* God in this *amiable* and pleasing view, there naturally arises an inward *veneration* and *esteem* for the Being possessed of so great and excellent a character; a very real and high *pleasure* in the *contemplation* of him; a *desire* of his *friendship*, an high sense of the worth and importance of his favour, and the strongest wishes to obtain it; the warmest *gratitude* for all his benefits, and an inward *care* to make the right *improvement* of them; a *fear* of his *displeasure*, and a due caution to avoid it; the *ambition* to *resemble*, and be in the most perfect manner conformed to him; the resolution and study to approve ourselves to, and be accepted of him; *pleasure* in *approaching* to and converse with him; impatience under the apprehension of his anger, and the utmost solicitude for reconciliation and peace; the *firm adherence* of the mind to him by faith and hope, and confidence in his perfections and promises; the *choice* of him as our *portion* and *exceeding great reward*, the entire *resignation* of ourselves to his disposal and will, and the chearful contentment of our hearts with the situation he appoints us; from a full persuasion that we cannot do too much for him in requital of his goodness, and that
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he never will do any thing with us unworthy his own infinitely glorious character, and inconsistent with our highest and eternal interest. These sentiments all concur to form this disposition; or at least, wherever love to God is the prevailing principle and affection, these things will be the certain concomitants and never-failing indications of it. And as God is supreme in all perfection and excellency of nature that can excite esteem, and deserve the affection of reasonable minds, he must be of all other beings the most worthy of our love, and of all the genuine and proper expressions of it.

To this *love of God* we must add, as the next command of great importance, and which every thing in Christianity conspires to promote, *love to men*, or what in my text, and in many other places, is rendered *Charity*. This word, in the *English* language, is generally used in a very restrained and limited sense, to denote the relief of the poor by *alms-giving*, or the cherishing *favourable opinions* of others, when they differ from us in religious sentiments and practices. But the *original* word *, which we

* The *Greek* word *agape* is used in profane writers to express the affection that takes place between brethren, that subsists between parents and children, that cements and endears the married life, that is the mutual and perpetual tie of friendship, and that arises from the sense of favours conferred, and benefits received. In like manner the *Latin* word *Charitas*, from whence our *English* word *Charity* directly comes, implies that strong regard, esteem and love, that are due to friends, to parents, children, brethren, relations, our lives, and our country, in which *Cicero* comprehends every other tender affection and charity

we thus render, hath a much nobler and more extensive meaning in the *New Testament*, when applied to men; as it seems to be peculiarly in my text, and many other places. It comprehends in it *affection* and favour to, and *approbation* of, *pleasure* and acquiescence in any person or thing that is, or ought to be dear to us. It denotes that pleasing, warm, and generous affection that should take place between *brethren*, that should ever subsist in the *married* relation, that should ever reign amongst *parents* and *children*, that *humanity* dictates even to *enemies*, and that every man owes, by the sameness and common ties of nature, to *all good* men especially, and to *all men* without exception. And the *universality* of this love is its characteristic in Christianity; for thus *St. Paul* prays for the *Thessalonians* †, that *God would make them to increase and abound in love, one towards another, and towards all men*; though there are *peculiar expressions* of it due in *particular relations* and connections of being; where nature, providence, compact, principles and religious engagements unite persons together; and even where it may seem to be least of all owing, we are as Christians commanded to shew it, to those who differ in religion from us, and even to our

rity of human nature; and which will sometimes excite men to die for those who are the objects of their love. *Chari parentes, chari liberi, propinqui, familiares. Sed omnes omnium Charitates patria una complexa est; pro qua quis bonus dubitet mortem appetere, si ei sit profuturus?* Cicer. de Offic. l. i. c. 17.

† 1 Theff. iii. 12.

enemies.

enemies. It must be, as to the nature of it, *sincere*, unfeigned, without dissimulation, in and from the heart and spirit, fervent, always abounding and increasing, constant and perpetual, if it arises to the Christian standard, and would secure to itself the comfort and hope of the gospel.

But then as there may be many *pretences* to this love of God, and charity towards men, were the reality, or at least the prevalence of it is wanting, and that none might think the whole of religion consisted in the mere internal affection for God, if that can be, without the proper effects of it, or in a friendly, benevolent disposition towards mankind, where other good dispositions are wanting, and any of the important duties of the Christian life habitually neglected; the Apostle lays down some rules, by which we may form our judgment of it, and certainly know whether it be sincere and acceptable. And this leads me

II. To the second general, which is to consider the *proper source* and *genuine attendance* of that love and charity which he here recommends. *The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*

To render our charity, or our love to God and man a disposition truly amiable and acceptable, it must be *out of a pure heart*. Some interpreters think, that this description denotes only the *sincerity* of this love, in opposition to what is pretended and feigned, hypocritical and deceitful; as St. Peter is thought to use

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the expression, when he exhorts those to whom he wrote †, *to love one another with a pure heart fervently*. And undoubtedly our love to God and man should be thus unfeigned and pure. But as *the pure heart* is here joined with *a good conscience and faith unfeigned* §, and is used in scripture several times, and even, as I apprehend, by St. Peter, in the place just cited, in a greater latitude, to denote a heart purified from all criminal affections and passions; I think the Apostle is to be understood in this *extensive* meaning in the place before us. Love to God and men, to render it of any avail, must be seated in a heart that is duly *cleansed* from all those evil tendencies and dispositions, that argue a real moral impurity, and are highly offensive in his sight and estimation, *who is of purer eyes than to behold sin* with approbation, *who hath no pleasure in wickedness, and with whom evil shall never dwell* *.

It is I believe possible, that there may be a real degree of *esteem* and *affection* even for God himself, considered as the greatest and most benevolent being, and as the great author and fountain of all good; at least there may be, because there have been, great professions made of loving God, where men are under the dominion of very bad affections, and allow themselves in the gratification of those lusts which are absolutely inconsistent with piety and virtue. And it is no uncommon

† 1 Pet. i. 22. § Mat. v. 8. 2 Tim. ii. 22. * Psal. v. 4.

mon case, to see men of the greatest humanity and goodness of temper, who have a real love to their country, and very remarkable benevolence and charity to others, yet wholly given up to the indulgence of their sensual appetites, and slaves to the most impure and criminal desires and pursuits. One cannot behold such instances without compassion, nor help grieving to see such amiable dispositions dwelling amidst such prevailing corruption and defilement. But to secure the true dignity and worth to our charity as Christians, it must be planted in a heart that is swept and cleansed from the impurities of sin, in which the love of it is extinguished, the dominion of it broken, the habits of it extirpated, and the prevailing passions and affections of the mind all regulated by, and subjected to, the power of principle, and the prevalence of righteousness and truth.

If our love to God doth not produce this good effect, it doth not come up to the Christian standard and measure of *loving God with all the heart and soul, and might and strength*. For he can never love God in this manner who loves the pleasures of sin *more* than God; as he certainly doth, who indulges to those pleasures which God forbids, and who will not renounce and forsake them, in order to obtain his favour, and secure his approbation. And therefore, unless the love of God so prevail in, and hath that influence over us, as to subdue and extinguish every criminal affection and habit in us, that would lead us to those indulgences,

indulgences which he hath prohibited; all pretences to it are groundless, insincere, and detestable.

In like manner, as to benevolence, charity, and *love to men*, how is this excellent disposition dishonoured and degraded, if the hearts of those who make pretences to it, harbour those vile affections, and are in the possession of those impure appetites, that must prevent the growth and prosperity of all better dispositions, and especially check the tendencies, and powerfully counteract all the dictates of a truly generous and friendly mind! For every real *vice* is in its nature *selfish*, seeks its own gratification, so far as it prevails, exclusive of the welfare of others, and is ever ready to procure it by such means as are contrary to and destructive of it; and therefore benevolence and the love of others, if they dwell in a wicked and polluted heart, must, in the nature of things, be greatly contracted, very uncertain in their effects, and their influence oftentimes entirely prevented, in some of the noblest and worthiest instances, by the more powerful bias and tendency of some contrary, partial and sordid disposition. Besides this, though goodness of temper, and the love of mankind, be consequently very amiable and desirable qualities, yet it is far from being the whole of religion and virtue, and cannot possibly extenuate the guilt of, or prevent the bad consequences arising from those irregular passions and habits, that possess the minds of bad men, and appear so evi-

dently in their conduct and behaviour. For the characters of men are not to be denominated from any particular good quality they may possess, but from the habitual state of their tempers, and the dispositions that influence them in the general conduct of their lives. A person may be a very sober man, as to eating and drinking, and yet upon the whole a very corrupt and wicked one, because under the dominion of many hurtful and dishonourable lusts; and there may be a native kindness and friendliness of temper, a very strong propensity to think well of, and do good to mankind, in those who have scarce any thing else good in their whole character, and are wholly, or in a prevailing manner subject to the government of sense and appetite. But 'tis absurd to imagine, that one good disposition, and which perhaps is the mere effect of natural constitution, and adds therefore nothing, as such, to their commendation, can be an equivalent for the want of all others, or a compensation for the indulgence of those which are offensive in their nature, argue prevailing corruption in their heart, and are really inconsistent with the true perfection and happiness of our being. This love therefore, and this affection and charity to men, must be cherished by, and attended with a prevailing purity of heart; an heart cleansed by the word and Spirit of God, from all sinful lusts and passions, and accompanied with those other graces and sacred affections, which are of equal worth and importance

importance in themselves, and by the constitution of the gospel of Christ necessary to final salvation and eternal happiness. Otherwise this even lovely disposition will contract such a foil and impurity, from the polluted seat it dwells in, as to forfeit the regard and acceptance of the most excellent and perfect being. But

2. 'Tis farther necessary to the giving our charity as Christians, or our love to God and man, its true value and importance, that it proceed from, or be attended with *a good conscience*, as well as *a pure heart*. Conscience is that power or faculty of the reasonable mind, by which it is capable of reflecting on, and becomes conscious of what we are and do; and therefore a good conscience is such a conscience as testifies to us that we do well, and that our actions are really good, answerable to our relations, and agreeable to the proper rule of our duty. When we are conscious to this, in the whole extent of our behaviour, allowances being made for the common frailties and imperfections of human nature, from which none are excepted, or when we have *the testimony of conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world*; conscience is then good, as it gives testimony to the truth, to what is really good and excellent in itself, and to what is highly conducive to our own honour, comfort and happiness. Now charity, to render it of any avail or worth, must dwell in this

good conscience, or be attended with this testimony of our own minds, that we endeavour to order our conversation in all things aright, and as Christians, that we *approve* and practise *the good and acceptable and perfect will of God* as revealed by Christ; or it must be productive of all those good and excellent fruits which this sacred disposition is designed, and hath a natural and powerful tendency to bring forth.

The *love of God*, recommended in the sacred writings, is not merely an *inward affection*, that lies unactive and useless in the mind, or that creates only some internal feelings, of which the mind alone is sensible; but a *powerful, active principle*, that excites and quickens to an answerable behaviour towards him, visible in all the fruits of real piety, and the practice of universal righteousness. Its general characteristic is, the keeping of God's commandment; for *this is the love of God*, the sure, the genuine evidence and effect of it, *that we keep his commandments* *; or as the Apostle elsewhere expresses it: *This is love, that we walk after his commandments* †, make them the rule of our entire conduct throughout the whole of life. And it makes the keeping of his commands an easy and delightful service. For *his commandments are not grievous* ‡, viz. to those who are under the influence of the love of God. And as the word of Christ is the word of God himself, as by

* 1 John v. 3. † Eph. ii. 6. ‡ 1 John v. 3.

him God in these last days hath spoken to mankind, the keeping Christ's word, by obeying the precepts of it, is necessary to perfect the love of God; to render it acceptable to him, and secure the benefits of it to ourselves. For *whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected*||. And if it be thus genuine and compleat, it will be farther productive of the love of the brethren, for *this is the commandment we have from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also*†; i. e. every man, as far as he is an object of love, for we are all brethren; and all sincere Christians in an especial manner, *who are all born of God by the word of truth*, related to each other as brethren, by their common relation to him as their reconciled God and Father, and heirs together of the same heavenly inheritance; for those who are *rich in faith*, are heirs *of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him*‡. He therefore who professes to love God, without keeping his commandments, and obeying the word of Christ; who is destitute of benevolence and affection to mankind in general, and to sincere Christians in an especial manner; can have no good conscience, because he is not, and cannot be conscious, that his love of God is sincere; in as much as it is not attended with those fruits and effects, which are the certain and never-failing indications and proofs of

|| 1 John ii. 5.

† 1 John iv. 21.

‡ James ii. 5.

the reality and prevalence of it. And indeed there cannot be a more infallible and decisive evidence of hypocrisy, nothing more odious and detestable in its nature, nothing that argues a more detestable and corrupt heart, than any ones pretending to, and boasting of his love of God and Christ, who at the same time habitually and wilfully violates the commands they have given, indulges his passions and appetites at the expence of his duty, and is void of humanity, affection and goodness towards those whom God and Christ have taught them to love by their own example.

And as the love of God hath its genuine effects, and must produce them, in order to create and support the testimony of a good conscience; so also hath *charity* or benevolence and *love to men*; for there is a *work and labour of love*, by which it discovers its efficacy and prevalence; and when we are conscious to ourselves, that our charity hath these fruits to evidence its truth and reality, we are thus far in possession of a good conscience, and may with St. *Paul* rejoice in the testimony of it. If it doth, as it certainly should do, extend to all without exception, it will discover itself at least by its good wishes and affectionate prayers for the general welfare and happiness of mankind. If it be unfeigned and affectionate, it will shew its own worth, and influence those who are under the constraints of it, to the most inoffensive, generous and
useful

useful behaviour. It will most effectually curb and keep under all the hurtful and mischievous passions of human nature, and in our conduct to others preserve us from every thing that may offend and grieve and injure them; for *love worketh no evil to its neighbour*, but extinguishes envy and malice, subdues pride and haughtiness of spirit, preserves from the bad effects of insolence, and from every thing in behaviour that is indecent and *unseemly*. It cures and enlarges the selfish disposition, *seeketh not her own* only, and scorns to bend every thing to personal pleasure and advantage. It lays a restraint upon the warm and hasty, the irritable, suspicious, peevish temper; for *it is not easily provoked*, and *thinks no evil of mankind* from the prevalence of a jealous disposition, and the ill nature of a malignant and distrustful heart. It takes no pleasure in the errors and faults of others, and derives no happiness from their crimes and punishments; for *it rejoiceth not in iniquity*, nor in any of the evil consequences that attend it. It inspires with the most humane and benevolent affections, opens the mind to all the dictates of liberality and goodness, and prompts to every thing that can contribute to the peace, comfort, and happiness of others. It is in its nature *kind* and friendly, and ready and voluntary in all acts, to gratify its own strong propensity to confer benefits on those who need its assistance and support. *It suffers long* before it loses its good opinion of others, and

casts them off as unworthy of its farther notice and regard. *It takes pleasure in truth*, and abhors all dissimulation and falsehood. *It conceals all things* that it knows amiss of others, and without necessity never publishes them to the world; but *covers a multitude of sins*, by forgiving and endeavouring to recover and reform the offender. *It believeth all things* that are good of others, where there is no just reason to suspect, nor proof of the contrary, nor ever easily gives into the unkind reports of ill-nature and malice. *It hopeth all things* to the advantage of others, whilst there is any ground of hope, and oftentimes when there are some circumstances that discourage and forbid it. *It endureth all things* that are tolerable in their nature, puts up with involuntary failings, and even bears long with greater offences, whilst there is any prospect of reclaiming the offender, and bringing him to a sense of his interest and duty.

In a word, that charity or love, which is recommended and enforced by Christianity, is that candid, right disposition of mind towards all men, that comprehends in it every thing that is implied in humanity, benevolence, and goodness of heart; and wherever it is genuine and the prevailing principle, is the most effectual and sure preservative against every wilful violation of social duty, and the most powerful and persuasive motive to every thing that is decent, regular, matter of obligation, kind, affectionate, useful, profitable, and conducive

ducive to the peace, honour, present prosperity, and final happiness of all those to whom it can reach its benign and salutary assistance.

Now if any one pretends to this charity or love, without being conscious to these distinguishing essential properties and effects of it, or if he knows that the charity he boasts of is attended with properties and fruits quite the reverse of, and contrary to these; he hath a very bad, or, according to *St. Paul's* epithet, a *defiled conscience*; because he is sensible of those moral impurities that the prevalence of Christian love ought effectually to cleanse him from: And if he be insensible to those criminal defilements which he really labours under, without care to amend them, or fear of their consequences, he hath what is much worse than a merely defiled conscience, what the scripture calls an hardened and a *seared one*. Natural benevolence, the affectionate temper, amidst such prevailing blemishes and corruptions of mind, becomes disfigured, and though it may retain somewhat of its original beauty and loveliness, yet appears so altered, and blemished with so many marks of deformity and wretchedness, as that it cannot be beheld without a mixture of great compassion and detestation. No, if Christians, you have a prevailing love to God, if your hearts be really in the possession and under the sacred influence of that affectionate, generous, and worthy benevolence towards men, to which the gos-
pel

pel of the Son of God calls you; unfeigned piety to God, will dignify the characters, and in the relations of life in which you stand towards men, the goodness of your hearts will exert itself, in all the worthy and commendable instances of a wise, prudent, just, equitable, compassionate and friendly behaviour. In such a state, conscience will suggest the most kind and comfortable reflections, and you may enjoy the suggestion, because it will be founded in truth.



S E R M O N XVI.

The Nature and Importance of Charity.

I T I M. i. 5.

Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.

THESE words contain a summary of all real and acceptable religion. The *end of the commandment* here means, the great intention and principal view of all divine revelation; and this is declared to be *charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and faith unfeigned*. I have shewn you what this charity is, and that it consists in the *love of God*, or that high veneration, esteem, gratitude and affection, which the consideration of his infinite perfection, and boundless, never-failing goodness demands from us, and will excite in the minds of all those, who suffer these reflections duly to impress and influence them; and in the *love of our neighbour*, i. e. the affectionate, warm benevolence of the heart, or the friendly, kind, compassionate, brotherly dis-

disposition towards him, that powerfully inclines us to wish well to all his interests, and promote his happiness. I have also shewn you, what that *pure heart* is, that must be the seat of this love of God and man; viz. an heart purified from all criminal passions, and those evil tendencies, habits, and dispositions, that create a moral impurity, and are highly offensive in the estimation of God; because without this we cannot love God with all our hearts and souls, and might and strength; for he certainly loves the pleasures of sin more than God, who will not extinguish this vile affection for them to obtain his favour, and secure his approbation; and because these sinful propensities and habits, wherever they possess the mind, create that partiality and selfishness, which tends to contract and extinguish the benevolent regard to our neighbour, and will check the growth, and prevent the best and kindest effects of it. This charity must also proceed from a *good conscience*, as well as a pure heart; i. e. from the testimony of our minds, that our love to God and man is habitually attended with all those good effects, which the prevalence of this sacred disposition will invariably produce; the pretension to which is effectually refuted and destroyed by actions that manifest a prevailing hatred to the moral government of God, and the want of all friendly regard to and concern for the welfare and happiness of mankind. I now proceed

3. To a third characteristic of this charity, which is, that it must proceed from *faith unfeigned*, as well as a *pure heart*, and a *good conscience*. *Faith unfeigned*, or as the original words run, *faith without hypocrisy*, or dissimulation, is such a belief of the truths of divine revelation, as is founded upon *real conviction* and evidence, and is therefore sincere and genuine, and not merely in appearance and pretence. An *hypocrite*, in the Greek language, is properly an *actor in a mask**; the ancient actors performing in a vizard or mask, appearing with fictitious faces, and acting a feigned part or character, that was not really their own; and hence it came by a very elegant and natural translation to denote one who pretends to be what *he is not*, or not to be what in reality he is; and when applied to religion and virtue, signifies one who pretends to, and puts on the appearance of that faith, sanctity and goodness, of which he is in truth and fact entirely destitute. Such a one, when his face wears the gravity and seriousness of a religious man, wears a mask, and puts on a countenance that is not his own. When he professes himself a believer, and engages with the people of God in the solemnities of worship, he is really a pretender and cheat, assumes the character that doth not belong to him, and is no more what he seems to be, than a mask upon the stage, who personates another, and for a while con-

* *ὑποκριτής*

ceals himself from the public observation and notice. A believer without the mask of hypocrisy, is one who is *persuaded in his heart* and conscience, that the principles of Christianity he professes to believe, are indeed the genuine truths of God; and his faith is unfeigned and without dissimulation, because it arises from a full and thorough conviction that the gospel doctrine hath a divine original and authority, and implies his firm assent and cordial submission to it as a revelation from the *Father of lights*, and the God of truth.

Now the charity spoken of in my text must be the effect of such a faith. Faith is the foundation of a Christian's love of God and his neighbour. 'Tis the root and principle of it, and therefore we find them frequently connected together in the sacred writings as cause and effect, as concomitant graces that equally possess the hearts of every sincere Christian. 'Twas the matter of St. Paul's thanksgiving to God for the *Colossian* converts, that he had *heard of their faith in Christ Jesus, and their love to all saints* †; and in his Epistle to the *Galatians* he tells us expressly: *That in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love* ‡. This is the sum and substance of Christianity, without which, whatever else we have, it is of no consequence to our salvation, and with which, we can be destitute of nothing that is necessary to it. And they

† Col. i. 4.

‡ Gal. v. 6.

add worth and efficacy to each other, inso-
much that faith without this charity is dead,
and will profit us nothing; and love, unless
it be supported and animated by principles of
faith, will either be entirely wanting, or else
languid, cool, partial and ineffectual.

The love of God cannot possibly subsist or
have any being in the hearts of men, but as
the effect of knowledge and belief. For
unless we know what God is, and believe
that he is an object worthy our veneration
and esteem, it is impossible we can have
any regard or affection for him at all; affec-
tion being, in the nature of things, founded
upon perceived excellency, or somewhat
amiable and lovely in the object beloved.
And therefore though there is but little to
be met with in the writings of the heathen
moralists about the love of God, yet *Socrates*,
who represented God under the character of
wisdom and beauty, says †, “ That could
wisdom discover her form clearly to our eyes,
she would excite the warmest affections to-
wards herself; and that beauty hath this pe-
culiar advantage, that it appears the most
lovely of all other things.” And they, some
of them, found the reasonableness of that
veneration and worship that is paid him,
upon the excellency of his nature, and his
being the great author of all good; and
teach, “ that the principal worship of God
consists in ascribing to him his proper majesty,

† Plat. in *Phædr.* 250. d.

and that goodness without which there can be no real majesty ||." And undoubtedly, this is a most certain truth, that the love of God is founded upon our believing him to be, what he is in his nature, the most excellent and worthy of all beings; and what he is in his providence, *the giver of every good and every perfect gift.*

Now the *faith* of a *Christian* furnishes such *peculiar* and *powerful* reasons and motives to the love of God, as natural reason and light could never suggest and dictate. It describes God as possessed and encompassed with the eternal majesty of absolute, immutable rectitude and perfection, as the universal creator, the source of all good, and the fountain of all life and happiness. And besides its agreement with natural reason in these principles, it gives the most affecting and surprizing account of the divine benevolence and compassion to mankind, exerting themselves in all those instances of goodness which are the noblest that can be in themselves, and answerable to all the real wants and best desires of their nature. For it not only describes God as the *creator*, but as the merciful *restorer* of *mankind*; as pitying them in their state of corruption and guilt, as forming eternal counsels of grace in their favour, as *sending his only Son in the fulness of time* to execute them, and to recover sinners, by his doctrine, precepts, promises, sufferings and death, his resurrec-

tion and intercession in heaven, to knowledge, true religion, the practice of righteousness, the favour of God by remission of sins, the privileges of children, the hope of life by a glorious resurrection, and, finally, *an abundant entrance into his everlasting kingdom and glory.*

'Tis impossible thus to know, and firmly believe in God as revealed by Christ, revealed as the most worthy, excellent, amiable being, and as abounding in all the infinitely valuable effects of the richest and most durable compassion and grace, without admiring and adoring this greatest and best of beings, acknowledging him as worthy our supreme veneration and esteem, and feeling within ourselves some suitable emotions of the warmest affection and gratitude. 'Tis not the mere apprehension or belief of God, as infinitely blessed and perfect in himself, that is the foundation of our love to him, or at least that can render him the object of our highest affection; but the belief of his *benevolence towards us*, his concern for our happiness, the experience of his goodness, and the value and number of the benefits he bestows upon us. And therefore the belief of the gospel doctrine, which represents God as *rich in mercy*, as having *blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus*, conferred on us many invaluable privileges in the present state, and made us heirs of eternal and incorruptible blessings in the life to come; 'tis this firm belief that is the foundation of our warmest gratitude to

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him, and renders our loving him with all our hearts and souls, and above all other objects whatsoever, both our interest and duty. Hence the inspired Apostle says, with the utmost reason and truth : *We love him, because he first loved us* *. Love is naturally productive of love, and 'tis the manifestation of God's goodness to us, and the innumerable proofs of the affectionate regard and love that he hath shewn us, which awakens in our minds the strongest sense of gratitude, that inspires us with, and keeps alive in our souls that supreme affection and esteem, which he claims and deserves, and which will animate our praises and perpetuate our love to him, throughout the endless ages of eternity.

Faith also, or the belief of the great principles of religion, is equally *necessary* to produce, or at least to raise to the Christian standard and perfection, the *love of our neighbour*. There is a kind of benevolence and affection to mankind, that is natural to some men. They are constitutionally disposed to be affectionate and generous. Humanity itself leads them to humane actions, and you cannot please them better than by presenting them with the opportunity of gratifying their native bias to be friendly and good. Happy disposition this, and how amiable is the character ! Such may be truly said, in the words of an heathen writer, to be formed of *better clay*, than others ; or rather, as I would

* 1 John iv. 19.

say, to be favoured by the God of nature with a more excellent constitution, and lovely temper of mind. But then it should be considered, that nothing, which is merely natural and constitutional to us, can have, as such, any character of religion and morality. 'Tis no virtue in any man, that he is hungry, or thirsty, or naturally dispassionate and calm, or good humoured, or inclined to pity, or to do good offices to others, or to be humane and social. To render *natural* good dispositions *virtuous* or *religious*, they must be *cultivated* by principles of truth, and *exercised* under the directions of *religious* and *virtuous* sentiments and motives.

The heathen moralists will recommend this love of mankind to you from the natural relation that all bear to one another, and tell you: "All that we behold is to be considered as one thing †. We are members of one great body. Nature hath made us all akin and related to each other. Hence arises mutual love, and the desire of society*; the affection between parents and children, kindred, relations, friends, neighbours, citizens, and the whole race of mankind;" hereby making the sameness of nature the foundation for all that affection which is due in particular relations of life, and from every man to the whole race of men. Yea, they go farther, and tell us: "That wise men are friends to wise men, even though they do not know one

† Senec. Ep. 95. p. 604.

* Cicer. de Fin. l. 5. c. 23.

another §, and that as nothing is more lovely than virtue, he who is a virtuous man, in whatever nation he dwells, ought to be loved by us."

Undoubtedly these reasons for mutual affection and charity are just ones, and they will be regarded by all who duly consider them. But are these the best and strongest that can be urged to promote this excellent disposition? *Christianity* furnishes us with *more powerful and effectual* ones, and the belief of the principles of the gospel of Christ will suggest to us much more interesting considerations on this important subject. It not only tells us, that we are related to each other by nature, as the same species of creatures, and of one common original by birth; but as the creatures of the same God, and therefore *children of the same heavenly Father, whose offspring we all are, and who hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth* ||. It represents God himself as the friend and benefactor of mankind; as *good to all* nations of the earth without exception; to persons of all conditions and characters; to the *just and unjust*, to the unthankful and undeserving, to his enemies, and the opposers of his government, as doing good for evil; as *patient and forbearing*, notwithstanding the numerous offences of sinful men, ever ready to pardon them upon their submission and repentance, and accept them to full and perpetual favour;

§ Cicer. de Nat. Deor. i. 44. || Acts xvii. 26.

that by this example of God men might learn to extend their charity wide as the nations of the earth, to exclude none from their benevolent regards, and to abound in all the fruits of goodness towards all, according as they have the ability and opportunity to do it, in imitation of God himself, and in obedience to his will; *for God is love, and he who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him.* Add to this, that as Christians we have not only the *example* of God to excite, but the *express command* of God to oblige us to cultivate this catholic disposition, and generous affection towards mankind; for thus we are expressly commanded to lay *aside all malice and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings* ‡, *to give all diligence to add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity* †. *To bless them which persecute us, to shew, like the good Samaritan, kindness to those of different religions from us, to recompense to no man evil for evil, not to avenge ourselves, not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good, to live, if possibly, as much as in us lies, peaceably with all men; to owe no man any thing, except it be to love one another;* a debt this we shall always be owing, though we are continually paying it; and which unless we pay and owe too continually, we should be nothing, though we had *faith enough to re-*

‡ 1 Pet. ii. 1.

† 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7.

move mountains, such charity to the poor, as to persuade us *to give all our goods to feed them*, and zeal sufficient to *yield our bodies to be burned*, because defective in one essential branch of our duty; and it would profit us nothing, because nothing can be a compensation for the want of it.

And though the spirit of Christianity extends our benevolence and affection to all men as such, yet there is unquestionably a *peculiar* good-will and love to the *more excellent* and worthy part of mankind, who better deserve regard, and have an especial claim to it. And here the faith unfeigned of a Christian will direct him to the choice of the proper objects, furnish him with the most powerful persuasives to cultivate, improve and strengthen this sacred and god-like disposition towards them. The objects themselves are those who believe in God, are the genuine disciples of Christ Jesus, and who honour their principles and profession by abounding in all those excellent fruits, by which alone they can demonstrate the truth of either. It was a very wise and just observation of an heathen moralist ||, “That he who is worthy of the divine acceptance, is worthy also to be esteemed by us; for it becomes him who is a lover of God to esteem whatever hath a divine resemblance, even all men who excel in and are distinguished by their virtue.” The faith of a Christian heightens and enforces this consideration, as the great

|| Hierocl. in Aug. Carm. p. 51.

intention of the gospel is, and the constant effect of it sincerely believed will be, to form men into a divine nature, to make them partakers of the image of God, and to impress them with the strongest resemblance to him in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, and thus to render them objects truly amiable and lovely. And when persons are thus created after God, the Gospel assures us, that they are accepted and beloved of him, fully reinstated into his favour, invested by him with a right to the most distinguishing privileges, and chosen by him to the final possession of the most excellent and durable inheritance.

Besides this motive to an undissembled love of all sincere Christians, that arises from the example of God, and the effects of his friendship to them, the genuine faith of a Christian farther informs him, that they all stand *equally related* to, and are equally interested in the *common Saviour* of mankind; whether they are *Greeks or Jews, circumcision or uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free* †; for by their faith in Christ they become his disciples, they are bought with the price of his blood, they are under the conduct of his Spirit, they are sanctified by his truth, they are fellow-heirs of the same salvation, and shall finally have an admission into the same heavenly kingdom and glory. These considerations contain in them the most powerful

† Colos. iii. 11.

inducements for sincere Christians *to love each other without dissimulation, to be kindly affectioned one to another, and to put on, as the elect of God, holy, beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humility of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, forgiving one another; if any man have a quarrel against any, to forgive them as Christ hath forgiven us; and above all, and what is comprehensive of the whole, to clothe ourselves with that charity which is the bond of perfectness; that which connects and closely ties together all the virtues that form the Christian character, and renders it compleat.* And this leads me to speak in a few words

III. To the third general, which is to shew you the *importance and necessity of this charity, out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.* It is declared by the Apostle in my text, *to be the end of the commandment,* and herein he agrees with the express doctrine of his Lord and Master, who in answer to the question, *which is the greatest commandment,* declared: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*†. This is what all the sacred writings turn upon, the great thing they are designed to promote, the principal and ultimate end, and indeed comprehensive of all the precepts they have

† Matt. xxii. 37—40.

delivered in the name of God. And this is what the Apostle declares to be the *end of the commandment*, which he himself had given; the great intention of all the precepts of religion and morality which he had inculcated and enforced, wherever he had preached the gospel. And this will appear if we consider, that

All the commands of the gospel, all the great precepts of religion and morality, contained in the law of *Moses*, and the law of *Christ*, may be reduced to, and comprehended under this single precept of charity; as it contains in it and denotes the love of God and man from principles of faith, operative and influential, and each exerting itself in its proper effects.

The *love of God* includes in it every possible disposition of genuine piety, and indeed is rather a complication of religious affections, the union of all the various graces of the Spirit of God immediately relative to him, combining their respective forces, and acting more powerfully by their union, than any one particular good affection whatsoever. For there enters into the idea of it, and it is the rich compound of faith, in veneration, esteem for God, approbation of, acquiescence in, and submission to his pleasure, gratitude, hope, desire, fear, delight in, and the adherence of the mind to him, as the indefectible source of good, and the sole fountain of its supreme felicity. So that no disposition of real piety can be wanting where the love of
God

God warms the heart, and hath the proper possession of, and influence over it. 'Tis evident from hence, that this sacred affection, thus extensive and comprehensive, must, like all other internal habits and dispositions, produce all its genuine effects, and powerfully prompt all the suitable expressions of it, in all the instances of rational adoration and worship, and in a chearful ready obedience to what he hath declared to be his will concerning us; and that all the exhortations and commands respecting our immediate duty and behaviour to God, are all comprised in this single one, of loving him with all our heart. In this is contained the *love of Christ*; since as the Apostle observes, *whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God, and every one that loves him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him* †; it being impossible that the love of God should be sincere, without our loving him who is *the express image of his person*, the only begotten of the Father, *full of grace and truth*; especially as we are indebted to the love of Christ to us, for the most powerful reasons to excite and perpetuate our esteem and love for God.

In like manner, what one humane, benevolent, tender, friendly, kind, generous, and worthy affection of our nature, can we feel, or ought we to cherish, that doth not concenter in the *love of our neighbour*? And where all these benevolent affections meet,

† 1 John v. 1.

form the governing temper, and actuate all the various pursuits of life; how inoffensive, how kind, benign, engaging, useful, full of compassion, sympathy, good offices, how *peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated*, how *full of mercy, void of partiality, free from hypocrisy, how long-sufferings, forbearing, forgiving*, how consistent with truth, how *venerable, just, pure, lovely, reputable, virtuous, and praise-worthy*, will the Christian and his conduct be, throughout the whole of life? His charity and love will permit him to do *no evil* to another, through the view of profit, and the love of pleasure. It banishes the passions that are *sensual and delivish* from the breast. It opens the mind to the most generous sentiments, sets the head, the heart, the hands at work, to gratify its own passionate desire to do good; *it rejoices with them that rejoice, and weeps with them that weep*, and thus kindly minding, *not only its own things, but those of others*, it is solicitous for their welfare, is pleased with every opportunity of promoting it, esteems the advantages and plenty of life as peculiarly valuable, and rejoices in the possession of them, principally for this reason, as they afford him more numerous opportunities, and liberal means of imitating the best of beings, and approving himself a genuine disciple of the compassionate Jesus, by works of goodness, and lending his assistance to carry on the great view of the moral government of God, in the present happiness, and final salvation of others. So that *charity* is truly the *end of the commandment*,

commandment, as it is the great intention of all the precepts of righteousness to promote it, and as there can be no defect in, or deviation from any social duties, or moral virtues, where charity forms the temper, and influences the conduct. It never deigns to dwell, but where it finds or creates a *pure heart*; it is the perpetual companion of a *good conscience*, makes its voice soft and pleasing, and fills it with satisfactions celestial in their nature, and which are preparative for and the earnest of joys fully compleat, uninterrupted and eternal.

Whatever end we can imagine the commands of revelation to have, we shall find they are most powerfully and effectually answered by the prevalence of this charity, or under the sacred and propitious influence of this love of God and our neighbour. Do they aim at the *honour of God*, the supreme Lord and governor of the world? He who loves him, must be desirous of promoting it, and doing whatever he doth to his glory; and if he loves his neighbour as himself, in obedience to and imitation of God, he will demonstrate the sincerity of it, by such an habitual behaviour towards him, in all the instances of undissembled friendship and goodness, as shall be full proof of the *prevailing regards* he pays to the *divine authority*, and his sincere desire of promoting that kingdom of God which consists in *righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*. Is the end of the Christian command to advance the *interest of Christ* in the

the world, and to render him precious and glorious in the esteem of mankind? As he was born and came into the world, to do his Father's work, to carry on the great purposes of his mercy, and promote the happiness and salvation of mankind; how can we better shew our regard for him, or recommend his religion with more advantage to others, than by loving God as he did, and imitating him in his friendship, affection and kindness to mankind? Doth the commandment aim at the *perfection of human nature*, and the creating men into a divine nature and resemblance? Remember, Christian, *God is love, and he that dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him*, and thus bears his image in the most amiable and attractive perfection of his nature. Is one great intention of the Christian command *peace on earth*, and to promote *good-will amongst men*, and hereby to advance the welfare and happiness of society? The love of God and our neighbour, prevailing in all its genuine fruits and effects, will effectually remove every cause of public discord, uneasiness and misery, unite men to God, and cement them together, in their endeavours to promote the happiness of each other, and the public safety and prosperity. And, finally, is the end of the Christian commandment to *prepare* men for, and secure them the possession of *eternal life and blessedness*? What ingredient can he want to self-enjoyment, and the happiness of the present state, in whose breast benevolence and fervent affection dwell? How well prepared is he who loves God for the heavenly

heavenly felicity, which arises from the perfection and perpetuity of this love? How fit for the enjoyment of the best of beings, who himself resembles him in goodness? How ripe for the society of those friendly beings, the Angels of God, and the perfected Saints of Christ, whose heart is purified from all malevolent dispositions, fitted for the services and pleasures of friendship, and prepared for all those sacred and exalted satisfactions that must be enjoyed in that happy world, where eternal harmony reigns amongst all the blessed inhabitants, where the foul spirit of jealousy, discontent and envy never enters to defile or trouble, where all hearts are enflamed by the love of God, united by fervent affection to each other, each is happy in himself, and continually heightening his own happiness by promoting that of others, and the love of God to all is the eternal source from whence they derive joys *unspeakable and full of glory*. Cherish therefore this godlike temper, as you increase in it, you will grow more meet for the happiness of heaven. That blessed world will at last receive you, and the God of love will compleat and perpetuate your felicity.

S E R M O N XVII.

The Case and Duty of an offending Brother.

LUKE xvii. 3, 4.

Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

THE scripture doctrine of forgiving and loving our enemies, and doing good for evil, hath been generally, and that with great reason, looked on, as one of the most *exalted* precepts of the *Christian* morality, and for the practising of which there is need of a great deal of reflection, resolution and virtue. The tendency to revenge is more or less in all, and the sweetness of revenge accounted by some the most sensible and exquisite; and undoubtedly where this disposition is naturally strong, there must be very powerful principles and motives to curb it, and keep it within the due bounds
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of religion and reason. Christianity certainly obliges us to suppress, and if we can, wholly extirpate it out of our breasts, and to cherish such humane, benevolent passions in the room of it, as may dispose us to bear evil in many cases, rather than to return it; and to reclaim and gain over an enemy, by the kind and gentle methods of forbearance, instead of attempting to avenge ourselves on him, and destroy him. But inasmuch, as even this doctrine of the forgiveness of enemies, and *the loving them that hate us*, and doing good for evil, hath its proper bounds and cases of exception, I shall endeavour to explain the scripture doctrine in reference to this subject; and from these words I shall

I. Consider the case here supposed, that of an offending trespassing brother, and what the doctrine of Christ makes necessary on his part. *If he repent.*

II. The duty of the party offended toward him who hath injured and trespassed against him. *Forgive him.*

I. I am to consider the case here supposed, that of an offending, trespassing brother, and what the doctrine of Christ makes necessary on his part. Offences will come, and men through the impulse of their passions will often transgress the bounds not only of benevolence and candour, but even of equity and justice, and gratify their disordered inclinations, to the manifest injury and damage of another. And this offence or trespass may respect

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they shall be treated, is to be superseded by, and give way to national prudence and justice. And according to these and the like circumstances, the nature of injuries differ, and will require a different behaviour, and claim a more severe, or kind and equitable treatment. With respect to all these I will only add, that as we should never depart from *humanity*, *candour* and *equity*, we should ever be disposed to put the most favourable construction upon the offences of others, to give every circumstance of alleviation its proper weight, not to judge of them by passion or partiality, but according to the truth of the case, and by the friendly suggestions of goodness and charity. But whatever be the injury done another, whether greater or less, yet if done voluntarily, let it be considered,

1. That this is a *wrong action* in its nature, *forbidden* by God, and therefore highly *offensive* to him. What is properly a man's own, and which he hath never justly incurred the forfeiture of, should be sacred and inviolable, and no one can have any right to abridge him of it, or render him uneasy in possessing it, to take it from him by violence, or deprive him of it by persuasion, art or fraud. The more effectual security of property is the great end of society, which God hath directed men by natural light, and for mutual conveniency and safety, to enter into; and all the laws essential to it, upon which the being and well being of it depend, have the sanction of his supream authority. These laws therefore are both

both human and divine, or rendered sacred by the authority of God and man, and he who willingly transgresses them, for the gratifying any private interest or passion, is an offender against both, and in many cases exposes himself to those penalties which are annexed, to prevent or avenge the violation of them.

If the injuries done another are of such a nature, as to be out of the cognizance and reach of human laws, which artful men in many cases may evade, yet are they cognizable by an higher tribunal, and will not fail of their just recompence from the supream and universal governor of the world, *whose soul hateth the wicked, and him that loveth violence*: And there is nothing more severely threatened in the sacred writings, or which God hath expressed greater resentment and indignation on the account of, than acts of violence, fraud and oppression. *Your iniquities, saith the inspired prophet *, have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. Your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity. Your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth. They trust in vanity, and speak lies. They conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. Their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hand. The way of peace they know not,*

* Isa. lix. 2, &c.

and there is no judgment in their goings. They have made them crooked paths; whosoever goes therein shall not know peace. Truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter, and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. And the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.

And as all these various kinds of wickedness and injustice are thus offensive to God, so there is that in every man's mind that convinces him, that they are wrong in nature, and contrary to the common obligations that subsist inviolably amongst all mankind. For the difference between light and darkness, between sweet and bitter, or any the greatest contrarieties in nature, is not more evident and indisputable, than the difference between truth and falsehood, justice and injustice; honour and baseness, and all the right moral dispositions and their contraries, where the judgment is not wholly perverted, the conscience entirely wasted, and all the traces of humanity are not utterly eradicated. And this sense of things appears very strong in the resentments that arise in the breasts of even the worst of men, upon any real or supposed injuries offered to themselves. If what they have of reputation be attacked by false aspersions, or even well grounded insinuations to their disadvantage, what names of reproach will they not throw, how loudly will they demand, and what severe methods will they take for reparation? If they be injured in their property by violence and fraud, how
bitterly

bitterly will they complain of the injustice, how eagerly try every method of law to do themselves justice, and if those fail them, have recourse often to the dictates of private revenge? If the honour of a near and dear relation be violated by force, or flattery, or promise, what will they scruple to do for repairing it? What will not the violence of their passion suggest, in return of the injury, even to destruction and death? In a word, every man feels an injury, grows warm at the thoughts of it, condemns it when he himself receives it, and thus allows and acknowledges it to be iniquitous, unjust and criminal. And from hence it follows,

2. That the offender is *bound* in equity and conscience to *own his fault*, and ingenuously to acknowledge it to him whom he hath offended. 'Tis to be confessed indeed *first to God*, whom as the supream governor of the world he hath sinned against, whose established order he hath broken, and to whose displeasure he hath rendered himself obnoxious; as *David* in the case of *Uriah* †. *Against thee, thee only, have I offended, and done this evil in thy sight*; because he had violated the laws of God, which required his exactest obedience, acted contrary to that allegiance which he owed to him, which is the first and strongest obligation of human nature, and because God only had a right to inflict on him the punishment due to his aggravated crimes,

† Psal. li. 4.

Next 'tis to be acknowledged to the *person injured*, because he is immediately affected by it, and suffers in some part or other of his property and interest. Such acknowledgment is the first step to reparation, and being a confession that the injurious action is wrong, and of the offender's concern for it, and resolution not to repeat it, argues an ingenuous disposition of mind, and the offender's returning to a sense of his duty and obligation. Nor is such an acknowledgment in the least dishonourable, or an argument of the want of courage and firmness of mind, or of meanness of spirit in him that makes it; the stooping to do an unjust action being the thing that is dishonourable and base, and the refusing candidly to own it when done, the circumstance that betrays a meanness and real cowardice of disposition. And this acknowledgment of a fault is not only the dictate of reason, arising out of the nature of things, but what is evidently prescribed by our blessed Saviour himself. This is plainly supposed in the words of my text. *If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him. And if he repent, forgive him.* The acknowledgment of the fault committed being an essential part of true repentance. In like manner our Lord advises §: *If thou rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, first be reconciled to thy brother; i. e.* do all that thou canst to appease him, and mitigate his anger, and prevent his coming

to extremities with thee; which necessarily implies making the proper acknowledgment of the fault, and duly professing a becoming concern and sorrow upon account of it. And thus St. James †. *Confess your faults one to another*, i. e. the faults by which you may have offended each other, *that you may be healed.*

3. Hence it follows, that according to reason and equity, the *offender* ought to be *first in seeking and offering reconciliation.* And this is what every ingenuous mind will readily submit to, as soon as ever he is convinced that he hath offended. The party aggravated hath not properly any submission to make, as not having transgressed the laws of God or man. His resentment of the injury is natural, and provided it be not disproportionate to the offence cannot be criminal. And as he hath done nothing to forfeit the good will and friendship of the other, is not in the first view of things, and according to the requirements of strict justice, obliged to seek after and make proposals of reconciliation. The injury as yet not repaired, and the offender not come to a due temper and disposition of mind, are just reasons to the injured person for his displeasure, and refusing the usual instances of kindness and friendship to the aggressor; and therefore it becomes him who is the faulty occasion of the breach of friendship, to use all equitable and prudent

† James v. 16.

measures of restoring it, and to make the first offers to recover and establish it. This is evidently included in the before-mentioned precept of our blessed Saviour ||: *If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, i. e. any just reason to complain of thy having offended him; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gifts. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him, i. e. whilst thou art going with him before the proper judge, whilst thy cause is yet untried, and before sentence is given against thee; least at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.* i. e. Thy delaying to compromise thy differences, and become reconciled to him, whom thou hast made thine adversary by the offences thou hast offered him, may so irritate and provoke him, as to put him upon the severest methods of doing himself justice, and exacting the most rigid satisfaction. From which passage it evidently appears, that according to our Saviour's precept, the offender is the first who is obliged to seek after reconciliation with him, whom he hath made his adversary, and this precept is enforced by this double consideration.

|| Matt. v. 23, 24, 25.

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1. The one drawn from the nature of religion; viz. that no offerings to God will be acceptable, unless we endeavour to appease and reconcile ourselves to such as we have offended; and that this, in God's estimation, is indeed preferable to any offering that we can bring to his altar. *Leave thy gift before the altar, and first be reconciled to thy brother*; and the plain reason is, because he who brings any offering to God, if he be an injurious person, and under the guilt of having transgressed any of the great obligations of justice and charity, and indisposed and unresolved to seek after reconciliation and peace with such as he hath offended, is not in the temper which becomes one who approaches to God, but under the influence of such an evil disposition, as renders him a necessary object of the divine disapprobation, and therefore makes him unfit to approach as a worshipper to God's altar, and his offering unworthy the divine regard and acceptance. Even prayer and thanksgiving, when presented before God, by false, deceitful, injurious men, who offend others without any concern and desire to appease and reconcile themselves to them, are an abomination in his sight.

2. The other reason, why the offender should endeavour a speedy and even immediate reconciliation with the party he hath injured, is the great inconveniencies to which he may expose himself by delaying or refusing to do it. He may involve himself in a tedious, expensive prosecution, and finally bring himself

himself under the penalty of the law, and so exasperate his adversary, as to cause him to insist on the most rigorous satisfaction, and use every advantage he hath in his power to oppress and destroy him. And though the carrying things to this extremity, even against an obstinate offender, is in many instances contrary to the rules of humanity, and Christian equity and benevolence, yet still the person who thus falls into the hands of justice, for want of taking the methods, by a proper and timely submission to prevent it, will have reason to blame his own obstinacy and folly as the cause of it. But

4. Lastly, *repentance* and *restitution*, are the necessary duties of the offender, especially upon proper admonition and rebuke. If *thy brother trespass against thee rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him*. And in another place†: *If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. And if he shall hear thee, i. e. submit to thy admonition, rectify what hath been amiss, and make good the thing in which he hath trespassed, thou hast gained thy brother*; recovered him from his fault, restored him to his virtue, secured him as thy friend, and prevented his remaining under the divine displeasure. The very end of such admonition, and making him conscious and sensible of his fault, is to bring him to repentance; which when spoken of as the duty of man towards

† Matt. xviii. 15.

God, or the duty of one man to another, always implies the inward change of the temper, and the suitable alteration of the external behaviour; the undoing as far as in our power of what hath been done amiss, and the entire refraining from it for the future; the repairing the injury we may have offered as far as we can, and a due care and diligence never to repeat it. This is all that can be done by the offender, and is his unquestionable duty; and the consideration of these things will be of use in stating and explaining the doctrine of the forgiveness of injuries, and in what latitude, and with what restraints, it is to be understood. And let what hath been said render all of us *cautious* in the whole of our demeanour and conduct, *to maintain consciences void of offence towards God and man*; remembering that every injury which we willingly do another, in any one valuable interest that belongs to him, is an immediate and direct transgression of the law of God, for which we render ourselves obnoxious at his tribunal, even though we should be cautious enough to sin within the limits prescribed by human laws, and so as that no earthly power can reach and correct us. And if we should any of us, at any time, be so unhappy, as through inadvertence, or the warmth of passion, or the surprise of some unexpected and extraordinary temptation, to offend our brother, by any injurious and wrong conduct towards him; let us have the courage and honour, the resolution

lution and firmness of mind, the integrity and virtue, candidly to acknowledge it, to express the ingenuous concern for it, the settled purpose of acting with greater caution for the future, and our desire and willingness to make all the reparation the nature of the injury requires, at least that we have the opportunity and power of making. This is a conduct rational in its nature, and though from the very imperfection of our beings we are liable to err, and may give just cause of offence to others before we are aware; yet to persist in the error, and refuse to reconcile ourselves to those we have offended, is not owing to any natural weakness, but to a criminal perverseness, and voluntary perversion of our hearts. The law of reason and equity is the law of religion and piety, and no man can be a reasonable, virtuous, or religious one, but he who is so careful as never to offend, or having offended is as careful to retract the offence, to reconcile himself to his injured brother, and never willingly to injure or offend him more.

II. Let us now proceed to the second thing, which is to consider, the *duty of the party offended*, towards him who hath trespassed against and injured him, *if he repent thou shalt forgive him*. For the better explication of which subject, let the following particulars be considered with due impartiality and care.

1. That Christianity no where forbids *all resentment of injuries*, and all degrees of anger upon

upon the account of them. This would be a prohibition that could not be complied with, and in many cases that ought not, and if it was would be detrimental to particular persons and societies. *Anger* is a *natural* passion, was not inserted into our constitution in vain, hath its proper objects, its seasons of rising, its motives for continuance, as well as reasons for abatement, remission and utterly ceasing. Our Lord supposes that *offences will come*. *It must be that offences come*, and the *woe* he pronounces is against those *by whom they come* †, and not against those who have reason to be offended, and are offended within the bounds of reason. And when he supposes the case of being *angry without a cause* *, 'tis allowing that there may be causes to justify our anger; and therefore the advice of St. Paul is: *Be angry and sin not*, there being no sin in mere anger, but as it is circumstanced and qualified.

The circumstances that render it *criminal* are: When we indulge and give way to it without *real occasion*, and when there is no just cause to excite it. *Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment* ‡; when we grow angry from our own imaginary suspicions and jealousies, or by crediting the forged, ill-grounded, malevolent slanders of others, or by accidental, undesigned, and involuntary injuries, or by uncandid, disingenuous, and unfriendly interpretations of actions in them-

† Matt. xviii. 7.

* Matt. v. 22.

‡ Matt. v. 22.

selves innocent, or for merely incautious speeches, *making*, as the prophet expresses it, *a man an offender for a word* ||, or for trivial, inconsiderable and slight occasions, that should be entirely overlooked and buried for ever in oblivion. On all these accounts we sin when we are angry, and cherish resentment against others, because there is in such cases no reasonable and justifiable occasions or reasons of it.

Anger is also *sinful* when it becomes *immoderate* and *disproportioned* to the *offence* that is given. Resentment must have its bounds, and be governed by reason and precept. If the fault be small, so should the resentment be too, if there be any. If the offence be alleviated by extenuating circumstances, so should the anger excited by it, and we should not suffer ourselves to be irritated and exasperated beyond measure, to be enflamed with passion, or transported by rage. The failure in a punctilio of respect, a misplaced or unwary word, an envious or unfriendly smile, a reproach that affects no real valuable interest of life, an injury that is attended with none, or very inconsiderable bad effects, should not awaken that height of resentment that may become us upon other more important occasions, or aggravated omissions, neglects, and ill-treatment. Our passions, all of them, and always should be, under the rein, and kept in obedience to reason and principle,

|| Isa. xxix. 21.

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and never suffered to controul and subdue them. The signs of an immoderate, disproportioned anger are, when upon improper occasions, and every slight provocation, we grow warm and impetuous, or break out into reproachful language, and abusive expressions; violent charges, and opprobrious names, things expressly forbidden by our blessed Lord, and which indeed are in their nature very unseemly and unchristian. *Who-soever shall say to his brother, Raca †, i. e. as the word signifies, empty-headed, or brainless, through an impotency of anger, and as a term of reproach when undeserved, shall be in danger of the council, i. e. expose himself to a punishment from God, as great in proportion as that of stoning was, which was inflicted upon extraordinary offences by the Sanhedrim of Jerusalem. But whosoever shall say, viz. without reasonable and justifiable cause, Thou fool, i. e, thou wicked, thou reprobate wretch, thou prophane, impious rebel, as this very word in the Septuagint translation, and the Hebrew word to which it answers, frequently signify, shall be in danger of hell-fire, or of the severest punishment from God. But more especially is this anger immoderate, when it pushes on men to measures of extreme revenge, to hurt their persons, to injure their reputation, to prejudice their substance, or attempt their lives, for those lesser injuries which had better oftentimes be entirely put*

† Matt. v. 22,

up, which may be amicably accommodated, and can never be prosecuted with the extreme rigour upon any principles of reason, religion, virtue, justice, humanity, and honour.

Farther, when our *anger* is suffered to *continue too long*, harboured without abatement, and is not mollified by time and reflection, it becomes also extremely criminal. It is an excellent prudential precept of *St. Paul*: *Be angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Neither give place to the devil* †. It is remarked by *Plutarch* ‖, of the followers of *Pythagoras*, that if at any time they had been transported with passion, and reproached one another in consequence of it, they shook hands, and kindly saluted each other before the setting of the sun; a practice which that wise and great man thinks worthy of imitation, and doth not scruple to recommend as such. And what *St. Paul* adds as a motive to enforce this exhortation, *Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil*; plainly intimates, that the long harbouring resentment will fix it into habit, and thus give the devil an entrance into and place in our hearts; as it will prepare the mind for the worst kind of suggestions, and for all those counsels and measures of revenge, which are often attended with the most destructive and fatal consequences; and to which men had never

† Eph. iv. 26, 27. ‖ De Frater. Amore, p. 488.

been prompted, had they timely suppressed their own resentments, and allowed them to give way to the cooler, gentler counsels of their own reason, and the religion of Christ. When they are so long indulged and cherished, as to settle into fixed habits and incurable dispositions of rancour, hatred, and malice, as to destroy all tendencies to reconciliation, as to frustrate all measures for peace, and render men unforgiving and implacable, it may be said with too much truth, that they have actually *given place to the devil*, as they have suffered themselves to be possessed by those malignant, dark, and mischievous dispositions, which are the genuine representatives of that evil spirit, and by which he often prompts and seduces them to execute his pleasure by the most iniquitous, vile, and execrable practices.

2. As the doctrine and religion of Christ doth not forbid all resentment of injuries, nor all degrees of anger upon the account of them; so neither doth it enjoin us to forgive such injuries *absolutely and in all cases*, so as to prevent our application to the civil magistrate for justice, and for redressing the wrongs we have sustained from others. Nay, it evidently countenances and allows such applications, upon all necessary and proper occasions. The admonition given by our blessed Lord * : *When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate*; supposes that the adversary hath a

* Luke xii. 58.

right to appeal to him, and that 'twas the magistrate's business to decide the controversy, to right the injured, and even punish the offender. And when the Apostle blames the *Corinthians*, and tells them *, *there is utterly a fault amongst you, because ye go to law with one another*, he doth not simply blame the injured person for *seeking his redress*, but for seeking it from *improper persons*, and from *heathen magistrates*, to the reproach and injury of Christianity †. *Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust?* i. e. the *heathen magistrates*, who were unfavourable to Christianity, and too often partial in their sentences and decisions. If *ye have judgments* or causes to be decided in judgment of *things pertaining to this life*; or as the words might be rendered, if ye have secular or worldly causes to be decided, *do you set them to judge who are of no esteem in the church?* What them? viz. the *heathen magistrates*? As though he had said: Is not this monstrous, that ye should chuse those for judges of your differences, of whom for their vices and corruptions, you justly have but little esteem? I speak it to your shame. *Is it so, that there is not a wise man amongst you?* No, not one, *that shall be able to decide between his brother?* Hereby plainly allowing the reasonableness of the appeal, when properly made, and the necessity of a just and equitable decision. But then there

* 1 Cor. vi. 7.

† 1 Cor. vi. 1.

are rules of equity, candour and justice to be observed, in all such applications, according to the laws of reason and Christianity, which you will give me leave briefly to mention.

Other methods of redress must be *tried first*, that argue more friendliness, and are dictated by a spirit of forbearance and goodness. *First*, the method of *private application* to the offender by the person himself that is injured, kindly remonstrating with him upon account of his trespass, impartially stating the case for his conviction, and persuading him, by all proper arguments, to cease the injury and repair it. This may oftentimes prevail, and establish a sincere reconciliation for the future. If this should prove ineffectual to bring him to reason, a *stronger application* by *other persons*, well acquainted with the case, and who have no interest in the decision of it for themselves, seems prudent and necessary, before matters are carried to extremities, and the law is appealed to for determining the case. And if even this should be in vain, *one farther trial* by a proper interposition of a more considerable number of unexceptionable persons, may be oftentimes a wise and requisite precaution, and if it proves successful will be an abundant justification of the measure; or if not, will be a commendable proof of our desire of peace, and endeavour to promote it. And this desire hath a very great authority to recommend it. If *thy brother shall trespass against thee*, says our blessed

blest Saviour, go tell him his fault between him and thee alone. If he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more; that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear thee, tell it unto the church. The meaning of the whole is; try by all methods of private friendly persuasion, and if it can be by more open and public rebuke, to bring him to reason and justice, before you proceed to severer methods, and cease to treat him as a friend and brother. St. Paul farther advises the method of *arbitration* and reference to some wise, prudent Christians of integrity, as extremely proper and becoming the Christian spirit and character. *Is there not a wise man amongst you, no not one that shall be able to judge between the brethren?*

And as these more gentle methods should be first tried, before men enter upon *prosecutions at law*, so they should not be begun upon every *slight* and *trivial* occasion. If the trespass be tolerable it may be wiser to suffer it; it being frequently better to sustain two lesser injuries than enter upon tedious and expensive suits to redress one. The quarrelsome litigious spirit, and the spirit of peace and love, which is the spirit of Christ, are extremely different from and contrary to each other.

When we have resolved on them, as a right and prudent method, though they should be managed with spirit, yet not with *rancour* and *bitterness*, so as to shew an implacable resentment, but rather so, as may make it appear to

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the aggressor, that the intention of the suit, is not to *injure him*, but to *right ourselves*, and that we are willing to drop the contention as soon as ever he is disposed to act the candid, just and honourable part.

The protracting of suits, and lengthening them out from a spirit of revenge, to render the prosecution chargeable and oppressive, to tire out our adversary, and force him to drop the suit unheard, and undecided, as unable to bear the expence of it, or to ruin him if he will not drop it, seems contrary to equity and justice, and generally speaking is the method taken by fraud or violence, and not by the cause that hath truth and righteousness to support it, which always desires a quick decision, and needs no iniquitous art to disguise and to delay it.

Nor should our suits and contests with others ever be so managed, as to *injure the cause of religion*, and prejudice the honour and interest of Christianity. Hence St. Paul censures the *Corinthians* for going to law before *heathen* magistrates, because this tended to give them an ill opinion of Christianity in general, to despise and contemn the doctrine of Christ, as encouraging, or at least consistent with fraud or violence, or a contentious spirit. Rather than give such ill impressions concerning Christianity, St. Paul asks the *Corinthians* †: *Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to*

† 1 Cor. vi. 7.

be defrauded? And I think there is no question, but that a man of real principle and piety, if his own personal interest, and the credit of Christianity should interfere with one another, would readily give the preference to that which is of universal consequence, and sit down contented with his own private loss; rejoicing that by sacrificing this, he can any way promote that nobler interest, which tends so much to the honour of God, the advancement of the name and cause of Christ, and the general welfare and happiness of the world. But

3. Though the *loving our enemies*, and the *forgiveness of injuries*, are unquestionably *Christian* precepts, and duties of great importance, yet Christianity doth by no means oblige us to forgive simply and absolutely, *all sorts of offences and trespasses* against us, without any conditions or limitations, or *without repentance, reparation, and amendment* in the offender. A disposition and readiness to forgiveness and mercy, and to be reconciled to those who have injured, should ever be cherished and prevail in us. But indiscriminately to forgive, and to receive to favour all who have injured us, whatever have been their offences, and whatever be their disposition, is real folly, and would oftentimes be greatly prejudicial to ourselves and the public, and therefore can be no duty of true religion, and therefore not of real Christianity.

Some trespasses against ourselves, or property, or family, may be of that nature, as
to

to be *violations* of the *principal laws of society*, which civil government hath a right to take cognizance of, which are not matters of private determination, which if permitted with impunity, would tend to the subversion of the public order and peace, and which, how much soever we may be disposed to forgive, and suffer to pass off with impunity, we have *no right to forgive*, and which if we conceal, and keep from public notice and censure, we become ourselves *injurious*, and trespass against the laws of our country, and the regards we owe to the rights of the community. The magistrate † is the *minister of God for our good, bears not the sword in vain, is the minister of God as a revenger, to execute wrath upon him that doth evil, to be a terror to every evil work.* And therefore we must be subject to them for conscience sake, not invade their rights, nor hinder and obstruct their executing judgment and justice upon such offenders as by their office they have a right to take cognizance of. And as the *law was made for the lawless and disobedient* *, and for all the enormous and capital offences that profligate and abandoned men are guilty of, *the law is good if a man use it lawfully, i. e.* agreeable to the nature and design of it, and such offenders are to be left to the law, and the just censures which that passes on them. So that here private forgiveness, such as exempts

† Rom. xiii. 3, 4:

* 1 Tim. i. 8, 9.

them from the notice of the law, is never to take place, because this would be itself a trespass against the law, and expose us to the censure of it.

In like manner, as to such offences as are *personal*, and which human laws may not be able to take cognizance of, being out of their reach, and artfully committed, so as not to be within the letter of it, yet they may be of such a nature, that the forgiveness of them, and taking the offender into favour and confidence, and treating him with friendship, and giving him our countenance, may be extremely *prejudicial to others*, and lead them into such transactions with him, as may be greatly disserviceable to them, and put it into his power to deceive and defraud and injure them. A person, that by our own transactions with, we know to be of no principle, to have no conscience, no scruples of doing ill, that waits for and readily embraces all opportunities of imposing on others; such a one should never be forgiven so as to replace him in our confidence, 'till we have good assurance of a proper change in him. A man of honour and probity would not be known to know him, or be seen to give him the least protection and favour; but avoid him and shun him as the pest of society, and the rule is: *With such a one, no not to eat.*

And as to other offences, which have not any immediate bad effects on the public, and which do not directly tend to mislead and deceive

deceive others; yet if they are *of consequence* to us, and affect us in any *valuable* part of our interest, even these are not to be so forgiven, as that we should receive the offender to our favour, and become thoroughly reconciled to him, without the *proper submission, repentance, and reparation*. Because this would often be an act of great weakness and folly, and give him an opportunity of repeating his injuries, and of affecting us more sensibly in some very valuable interest of our beings, This case our blessed Lord hath himself determined, when he tells us*: *That if our brother hath trespassed against us*, and after we have admonished him *privately*, and *before two or three witnesses* †, and in the presence of the church, yet he will not bear, and be gained over to a sense of his duty ‡, *let him be unto thee as an beaten man, or a publican*: i. e. *Disown him for a brother*, have no confidence and friendship with, nor ever count him worthy of thy affection and favour. And in my text §: *If thy brother trespass against thee rebuke him; and if he repent forgive him*; plainly implying, that without repentance he is not entitled to forgiveness. And in the exhortation to the offender to be reconciled to his brother, and to agree with his adversary, *whilst he is in the way with him* ||, 'tis plainly allowed, that if he will not reconcile himself and agree with him whom he hath made his adversary,

* Matt. xviii. 15. † Ver. 16. ‡ Ver. 17. Luke xvii. 3.
§ Matt. v. 25.

by the trespass he hath committed against him, the adversary hath a right to implead him before the proper magistrate, and do himself that justice by law which the other obstinately refuses to yield him.

The great pattern held up to our consideration, by the sacred writings, and to which we are to conform ourselves in doing good for evil, and the forgiveness of those who trespass against us, is *God*. His conduct we should observe, and in imitating his example it is impossible we can err; we are exhorted *to be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us* *. Now how doth God forgive us? What, without repentance, and though we will not be persuaded to confess our fault, ask pardon for it, and turn from it, and amend it? No, surely *repentance* is the *condition of mercy*; sense of the fault necessary to the remitting it; seeking reconciliation and peace necessary to the having it; and the forsaking what we have done amiss, and amending for the future, the reasonable condition of being freed from the guilt of what is past. *God* indeed exercises *great patience and forbearance*, gives time and space for repentance and amendment, and *doth good to the evil and unthankful*. True. But what is the end of all this? Not to lead them to conclude that they shall be finally forgiven without repentance, but to

* Eph. iv. 32.

persuade them to repent; and if God's goodness doth not lead them to this, as their ingratitude heightens their guilt, it will proportionably enhance their punishment. In like manner to forgive those who have offended us their trespasses is our duty, *i. e.* provided they are in a disposition fit for forgiveness, by being sensible of their fault, ingenuously owning it, and giving the proper evidences of a sincere repentance for it. But whilst the offender persists in his injurious course, aggravates one trespass by another, is not sensible of his past fault, or will not own it, or will not amend it; this is an absolute forfeiture of all confidence, friendship, and favour, whilst he continues in such a disposition, and that forgiveness of him can never be a duty, that will not reclaim him from what is bad, and persuade him to do better, and which therefore can be of no service to religion, or promoting any one valuable concern of our own, or of others. This refusal indeed to forgive and be thoroughly reconciled to an offender doth not cancel the obligations of humanity, nor release the party aggrieved from promoting a reconciliation, by gaining over the offender to his duty, nor from doing him any friendly offices that we can, consistent with our own safety and welfare, as will be shewn you. But 'till he is thus, or by some other proper methods gained, he takes upon himself the character of an *adversary*, and gives a right to his aggrieved brother to consider

sider, guard against, and treat him as such, *i. e.* to break all confidence and friendship with him, and never more to return to either, 'till he return to a better mind, and render himself worthy and fit to be restored to them.

Let us, however, all of us, cherish the peaceable disposition, and always *follow the things that make for peace.* Regulated passions and moderate resentments are the signs either of a goodness of natural dispositions, or of the power of religious principles, and sometimes of both; and to pass through the world without great enmities and contests with others, is a desirable thing, and may in a great measure be obtained by following the prudentials of the gospel of Christ. Enmity for enmity, and spite for spite, I am sure a good man, a true Christian, will not return; and if he hath an enemy he is resolved hatred shall dwell in one breast only, and that his shall ever be open to the counsels of moderation and charity. Involuntary lesser errors he will always overlook through the compassions he hath for the frailties of human nature; those which are greater he will resent with decency and temper, wait with patience to gain over the offender, and if forced to vindicate his own rights by the methods which human justice allows him, will ever do it with all that tenderness and forbearance, which is consistent with his own security and success, and shew himself always ready to be a friend to another, when
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he can be so, without becoming an enemy to himself; as remembering, that *the wrath of man never works the righteousness of God*, and that *the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy*, and that *the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of those that make peace.*



SER-

S E R M O N XVIII.

The Christian's Duty towards his
offending Brother.

LUKE xvii. 3, 4.

Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

I Am to consider from these words, the nature of that *forgiveness* of injuries which our blessed Saviour hath in these words recommended to us; I have already shewn you, that all resentment of injuries and all degrees of anger upon account of them, are not forbidden by our blessed Lord, but only such anger as is *immoderate*, and *disproportioned* to the offence that is given; or when 'tis suffered to be continued *too long*, or when it is excited and nourished *without a cause*. Neither farther are we obliged so to pass by and forgive injuries, as never to seek the *redress* of them

them from *public justice*, and the assistance of the civil magistrate. This is lawful, provided we try *first* other *more friendly* methods of redress, the occasion be of *importance* enough to justify the necessity and prudence of an appeal to the public, do not manage it with *rancour* and *bitterness*, do not protract and burthen them for revengeful and oppressive purposes, nor any way *injure* the cause of *Religion* and *Christianity*, by the methods we engage in to manage and support them. Nor farther doth the precept and forgiving injuries oblige us to forgive simply, absolutely and universally, *all sorts* of trespasses and offences against ourselves, without any conditions, *without repentance*, reparation and amendment in the offender. Such offences against ourselves, as are offences against *civil society*, though we may forgive them for *ourselves*, we cannot, ought not to forgive them for the *public*; nor in instances of a more private and personal nature, where such forgiveness may be *prejudicial to others*, and give the offender an opportunity to injure and abuse them; nor in any instances that relate only to ourselves, and affect us in any *valuable part* of our interest, without the proper *submission*, *acknowledgment*, and *amendment* in the offender; because this would be obliging us to forgive, where there could be no obligation in reason to forgive, and where that forgiveness would oftentimes be attended with very bad and mischievous consequences. I would now observe farther,

4. That

4. That this precept of forgiveness is opposed to all *personal* and *private* revenge, the *endeavour* after and the *desire* and *prayer* for it, and is a command absolutely to abstain from it, and to suppress all that rancour, malice and hatred from whence it proceeds. *Revenge* is that disposition which prompts men to wish or to return one evil for another, for the sake only of *hurting* or *doing evil* to him that hath injured us. Now the forgiveness of injuries required by Christianity stands directly opposed to this, and we are commanded so far to moderate our resentment, and suppress our anger, and overlook the trespass committed against us, as never to take the avenging it into our hands by repaying one evil with another, or by procuring such evil to be returned by any others whatsoever, or by wishing it from God for the sake only of punishing, rendering miserable, or destroying an adversary. The law of retaliation, as commanded by God †, *eye for eye, and tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe*, was a rule of *direction* for the public *magistrate* or judge; but perverted by the corrupt *Jews* into a licence for private revenge, and doing all they could to injure and mischief their enemies. In opposition to this our Saviour commands: *But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil*, viz. by way of revenge, so as to put out his eye that hath put out your's, and merely for the sake of doing him

† Exod. xxi. 23, 24, 25.

the same evil that he hath done to you. But in all tolerable cases rather suffer two injuries than spitefully revenge one. *Whoſoever ſhall ſmite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other alſo.* i. e. Rather ſuffer a ſecond ſtroke than revenge thyſelf by returning the firſt. *And if any one will ſue thee at law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak alſo.* i. e. Rather ſuffer the loſs of both, than maliciously proſecute him, in order to deprive him of either of his own. *And whoſoever ſhall compel thee to go a mile, go with him two;* viz. rather than hurt him, by committing any violence to prevent thy going one. So that the thing commanded is not ſimply and abſolutely *not to reſiſt evil, or to turn the cheek to the ſmiter, or give the cloak to the robber, or go two miles with* a troubleſome and poſitive impertinent; but to do all this rather than indulge to impatience of ſpirit, impotency of anger, and a revengeful, vindictive diſpoſition, which is abſolutely inconſiſtent with the dictates of reaſon, and the principles of all true religion.

This was acknowledged by the *Heathen Moralists*, one of whom thus argues †: “ A wiſe man will never actually return an
“ injury to a bad man, nor be willing and
“ deſirous to do it. If to do an injury be a
“ bad thing, to return an injury is like it; and
“ if he who doth an injury doth ill, he that
“ returns one evil with another, nevertheleſs

† Max. Tyr. Diſſert. 18. ſ. 5.

"doth ill, though 'tis an evil that he re-
 "vengeth; just as he who returns a benefit
 "to him that hath done him one, doth well,
 "though he first received one, so he who
 "returns an evil, doth nevertheless ill, though
 "treated ill himself first." "Nay, says he †,
 "I will venture to affirm, that if the in-
 "justice of one of the two be greater than
 "the other, he who revenges an injury is
 "the more wicked man of the two, than he
 "who first offers it;" an observation, that in
 most cases, if not universally, is most unques-
 tionably true. Hence St. Paul to the Ro-
 mans §: *Recompense to no man evil for evil.*
Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather
give place unto wrath; let it have its course,
 and suffer the effects of it, rather than by
 revenging, thereby invade the province of
 God; who hath said: *Vengeance is mine,*
and I will repay it. The same advice he gives
 to the Thessalonians ||, agreeable to which is
 that of St. Peter †: *Render not evil for evil,*
nor railing for railing; but contrary blessing;
knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye
should inherit a blessing. It is on this account
 that we are commanded to suppress and ex-
 tinguish all those inward passions and affec-
 tions, that are the great incentives and promp-
 ters to revenge*; such as *hatred, variance,*
emulation, wrath, strife, envying, bitterness,
anger, clamour, evil-speaking, and malice ††;
 and men of this character, such as are *lovers*

† S. 9.

§ Rom. xii. 17—19.

|| 1 Thes. v. 15.

† 1 Pet. iii. 9.

* Gal. v. 20, 21.

†† Ephes. iv. 31.

of themselves, boasters, proud, without natural affection, despisers of those who are good, heady, fierce, and high-minded *, are commended to be avoided, as men unworthy to be acknowledged as Christians, and incapable of the gospel salvation; and when they are actuated by this spirit, and have bitter envying and strife in their hearts †, they are said to be governed by that wisdom which is earthly, sensual and devilish ‡. And on the other hand, the virtues contrary to these, are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, and thelike, which are represented as fruits of the Spirit, and therefore as virtues that form the disposition of every Christian, who as such live by and walk after the Spirit. And therefore we are commanded to be slow to wrath §, to be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us ||; to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love **; to let nothing be done through strife, but in lowliness of mind, each to esteem others better than themselves ††; and to put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave us ‡‡; and above all these things to let the peace of God rule in our hearts,

* Tit. iii. 2—4.

† James iii. 14, 15.

‡ Gal. v. 22

—25. § James i. 19.

|| Eph. iv. 32.

** Eph. iv. 1, 2.

†† Phil. ii. 3.

‡‡ Colos. iii. 12—15.

and to put on charity which is the bond of perfectness *; that charity which suffereth long and is kind, that envieth not, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things. To live under the power and influence of this humane, benign, mild, relenting, compassionate disposition, is to be governed by a wisdom truly divine, which hath for its distinguishing, amiable characteristics, that 'tis peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. And therefore the † beatitudes, or great blessings of the kingdom of God are confined by our Saviour himself to the poor in spirit, to the meek and merciful, to the peace-makers, to the persecuted, reviled, and reproached for righteousness sake; and in a word, to those who on these accounts and others like them, are perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect.

And that private revenge is contrary to all the dictates of reason, wisdom and morality, as well as repugnant to the genius and spirit of Christianity, is evident from many considerations.

By this means men constitute themselves judges in their own causes, act by resentment, passion and anger, and oftentimes as they are hurried on by malice and hatred, and a spirit of fury and cruelty; in which situation men

* 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7. † Matt. v. 3—11.

are the least able to pass the fair, equitable judgment, to discern and determine rightly concerning the merits of the case, and the nature of the injury they have received. They judge as self-partiality, inclination, pride, imagination, and other wrong affections and views prompt and dictate to them, and would justify themselves except against any one for their own judge, under the like bad prepossession and influence. And what is yet worse, they not only judge for themselves, in every case of revenge, but judge and condemn the person who is the object of their revenge, though they often know nothing of the motives that influenced him to the offence they resent, nor of those circumstances that might alleviate and extenuate it; and thus act the part of unrighteous judges, who condemn without hearing the cause, and punish without offence, or above the real aggravation of it.

Hence it is, that society hath taken the cognizance of offences and causes between man and man, that no one may be judge for himself, and punish according to his own resentment, but submit to and be determined by the more equitable decision of others. And therefore for private persons to prosecute their own revenge is the highest *injury to society and government*, and if this should become universally the case, societies must immediately disband, and nations be involved in the utmost confusion and disorder.

If therefore we fail of having redress, in any supposed or real injuries we receive from others, from the civil power or magistrate, the rule of religion and reason is, that we must so far absolutely forgive it, as not to take the judgment into our own hands, and repay it with a like injury; because we are not the competent judges of the case; but we must contentedly *refer the cause to God*, who by his own providence can do us justice in the present world, and will either here or hereafter rightly determine the controversy between us, and give to every man according to his works. But then

It should be farther considered, that even the prosecuting men before the civil magistrate, *merely* through passion, resentment and the desire of their punishment, is as real, and as truly criminal an instance of *revenge*, as though we executed it ourselves in person. The guilt of private revenge is, not merely the inflicting evil upon another; for this we have a right to do in many cases; as parents, for instance, in the punishment of their children, and every man, as far as is absolutely necessary for self-defence; but the guilt of it consists, in our *usurping the rights of God or society*, being actuated by *rancour, malice, and cruelty*, and in our taking pleasure in their suffering, rejoicing in their evil, and delighting in their destruction. And if the *same* dispositions actuate us, in the prosecuting our causes before the proper judge, the cause may

may be good, and the prosecution in one view of it lawful; and yet we may be at the same time gratifying our malice, feeding an implacable spirit, and pursuing the measures of a very criminal revenge. And therefore, in a word, when we oppress, render miserable, or prosecute to destruction, any person whatsoever, when we can see nor propose any public utility to be answered by it, and when the doing it is not absolutely and indispensibly necessary to the preservation of our persons, or some essential interest of our being; 'tis not easy to conceive that there can be any other motive to such oppression and persecution, but the gratifying those inhuman, intemperate, fierce, implacable, and diabolical dispositions, which argue men divested of humanity itself, and wholly exclude them from the character and privileges of Christians. I will only add,

That as we are not to gratify these kind of affections, either personally; or by an application to the public, so neither are we by any applications and prayers to Almighty God. In this sense, persons may be very religiously revengeful, *i. e.* think themselves very religious and pious, whilst they are only gratifying their own resentments; and may imagine that to be a zeal for God and truth and righteousness, which is in reality nothing more than the fervour of ungoverned passions, and a disposition to malice and revenge. 'Twould be reckoned an argument of great profaneness and impiety for any one to curse

in common conversation, or merely through the effect of hastiness, and the natural warmth of temper. But surely *deliberate curses* are much more criminal, and when we imprecate curses on the heads of our enemies in our solemn devotions, whether they be public or private, any farther than is necessary to promoting God's honour, and the preservation of the public happiness, all such kind of prayers are in their nature contrary to humanity, and inconsistent with the Christian rule, which is * : *Bless and curse not.* But

5. As the precept of forgiving our enemies is opposed to malice and revenge, so is it to all *hastiness, rash resentment, and that impetuosity of anger*, that puts men upon extream methods, before they have tried the more mild and moderate ones; and therefore though the offender be in the reason and nature of the thing obliged to humble himself, and should be first in the offers of reconciliation; yet if he should be wanting to his duty in these instances, there is nevertheless a duty incumbent upon us, and before we wholly cast him off, and reject him as unworthy our friendship, we are bound by the express law of Christianity to *endeavour to reclaim him*, and use all the methods of generosity and kindness, reproof, conviction, and argument to reclaim him, and bring him to a sense of his sin, his interest and duty. He that is a willing offender against his bro-

• Rom. xii. 14.

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ther is in that an offender against God ; and therefore true Christian benevolence will rather be solicitous to recover him out of his guilt, than to punish him for his offence ; and had rather restore him to God's favour, and reinstate him in his own, than see him incapable of, or banished from either. And therefore according to our rule,

Great *patience, lenity, and forbearance* are to be used towards those who have trespassed against us, and we are to wait till they have had time for recollection, and to become sensible of their conduct, and to cherish a better disposition and temper of mind towards us. When the lord in the parable had ordered the servant that owed him ten thousand talents to be sold, himself and family and all that he had, and payment to be made him, upon that servant's falling down, and saying † : *Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all ; the Lord of the servant was moved with compassion, and forgave him all ;* a representation to shew us, how improper sudden and hasty resentments are, how much more worthy and humane 'tis to give space for calm and cool reflection, how natural the offender's claim to patience, and how the very purpose in him to repair the injury as far as in his power, is almost reason enough to induce us entirely to forgive it. And this very patience is itself a temporary forgiveness, and prepares the breast for an absolute one.

† Matt. xviii. 24, &c.

If mere forbearance will not do, Christian benevolence will go *farther*, and not stand upon the punctilio of being first applied and sought to for a reconciliation, but will excuse form for the sake of peace; and dispense with ceremony for the nobler purpose of being kind and generous; yea, *yield up* some of its *own rights* in order to bring the offender to the consideration of his interest and duty. Humanity and Christian candour will find out kind apologies and excuses for him, and condescend calmly to represent to him the nature of his offence *in private* only; contented with the most private reparation if that can be obtained, and rejoice if it can thus gain a brother, without any farther offence and displeasure to him. If this proves ineffectual, he will strive to do by others, what he hath not been able to effect by himself; and employ such persons for number and qualification, as he judges most likely and proper to heal the beginning of strife, and to prevent a lasting contention and enmity; according to our Saviour's precept*, *of telling him his fault alone*, and then *in the presence of two or three more*, and then *before the congregation*.

And if even this proves ineffectual, the Christian disposition of goodness will reach farther, and exert itself in those *kind and friendly offices toward the offender*, as far as can be done with prudence and safety, as shall shew a freedom from all rancour and bitter-

* Matt. xviii. 16, 17.

ness, a generous concern for the offender's interest, and a sincere desire of reconciliation and peace. And the reason is evident, because humanity would prompt to this, if some unworthy passions did not prevent it, the conquest of which passions is the noblest victory, and gives us a triumph of all others the most honourable and pleasing. The preventing enmity, and the perpetuity of animosities and hatred, is prudent in its nature, and every kindness we shew an enemy, that disarms his anger, and disposes him to a reconciliation, is in fact shewing kindness to ourselves. Every offence is not a forfeiture of friendship, and therefore should not prevent the generous effects of it. *To seek peace and pursue it* with all, is our unquestionable duty, and is an amiable disposition in itself; and therefore the ill humours of others should never indispose us for acting right, and pursuing private or public peace, by every prudent method of benevolence and friendship that is within our reach. Hence arises the reason of those precepts, that are so frequently inculcated in the sacred writings; *of doing good for evil, of overcoming evil with good, of condescending to each other, of following the things that make for peace, of working no ill to our neighbour*; precepts that are the very dictates of goodness, and breathe the genuine spirit of true religion and real Christianity. And therefore farther,

6. If by any prudent and kind methods we have taken, or by his own proper recollection
and

and sense of his fault, the person trespassing against us is brought to a right disposition, makes the proper acknowledgment, and recompenses the injury as far as in his power; *forgiveness* becomes the immediate duty of the party offended, and thus stands opposed to an implacable and unforgiving spirit. *If thy brother trespass against thee, and he repent, forgive him.* i. e. If he acknowledge his fault forgive him. And this forgiveness must be genuine, sincere, and *from the heart*; according to the rule, *so likewise shall my heavenly Father do unto you* †, i. e. severely punish you, *if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses*; and if they who have been themselves injured, would but candidly put themselves in the place and circumstances of those who have offended, they would soon learn to pass the proper judgment on the nature and degree of that forgiveness that is reasonable in itself, and comes up to the requirement of the gospel. The grand, comprehensive characteristic of it is, that it come from the heart, be real, and with the utmost sincerity, not feigned and artful, but *in truth and in deed*. This implies

The suppression of all our former resentment, and *the ceasing to be angry*, and the putting an entire end to our displeasure towards the person offending us. *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry*, says the royal preacher. But inasmuch as this is frequently a *constitutional*

† Matt. xviii. 35.

weakness, and the first motions to anger are not sometimes in our power, therefore he adds : *Anger reflecteth in the bosom of fools.* The only possible good use of anger is, either its being a *means of self-preservation*, or a *motive to the offender to repent*, and alter his conduct for the future. When these are gained, anger becomes irrational and criminal in us, and a real injury and injustice towards him. He then becomes the aggrieved party, and there is an acknowledgment due to him of the offence we have committed against him ; because he ceases to be an object of anger when he ceases to be an offender, and the continuance of our resentment against him is without a cause. And therefore forgiveness necessarily implies the freeing our minds from all bitterness and wrath, as though he had never offended us. And in consequence of this

Forgiveness farther includes the *putting an end* to all future *prosecutions* of the injury, and our ceasing to use all methods whatsoever to subject the injurer to any kind of inconveniencies and disadvantages upon account of the trespass forgiven. Such prosecutions are always in their nature unlawful, when carried on with spite, and with a design only to damage or oppress another. This is properly *revenge*, and not a method of self-preservation, nor a dictate of equity and justice. And when men become implacable in such prosecutions, 'tis malice and hatred that influences and prompts them, and not merely a desire

desire to vindicate their honour, or secure their property. The just and honourable prosecution of our resentments, aims at nothing farther than bringing the offender to do justice, by owning his fault, and making all the reparation in his power, and preventing as far as we can his injuring us for the future. When these ends are answered, the harbouring any farther designs against him, and the continuing to use and treat him as an enemy, is contrary to benevolence and equity, and consistent with no principles of truth and righteousness whatsoever. His repentance, as it doth in reality cancel his fault, intitles him to forgiveness, and should cancel in us every farther purpose to aggrieve and punish him. Real repentance, manifested by the proper fruits of it, is all an offender can do; and when this is done, every farther method to aggrieve and punish him, either in his reputation, usefulness or property, is doing him a real injustice, and making ourselves in our turns become criminal aggressors. But even this is not enough. Christian forgiveness goes farther yet, and when 'tis from the heart implies:

The *returns* of all the *kind* and *friendly affections* towards him. If the exercise of these should not be suspended, even whilst the injury remains unrepaired, and the offender makes no acknowledgment, nor any advance towards a reconciliation; if we ought, as hath been shewn, to endeavour ourselves by methods of forbearance and goodness to
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seek for peace, though we have not been the real occasions of interrupting it; how much more ready should we be to return in affection, esteem and kindness to the offender, in answer to his disposition and advances for peace; when changed from himself, he not only ceases to offend, but acts as a man, a friend, and a Christian, and solicits the recovery of our forfeited friendship. There is somewhat so ingenuous, frank, and honest in a person's owning his fault, so much honour, candour, and integrity in his expressing his sense of it, and asking pardon of him whom he hath offended, when it appears to be done from real conviction, and a genuine concern for it; as that 'tis impossible for a good mind to be unaffected with it, and not to esteem the resolution and virtue of him that doth it. It naturally opens the heart to receive him, and almost forces the return of the most friendly affection and esteem towards him. And without this what is forgiveness? If the resentment continues lively and strong, we yet consider him as an object of our displeasure; and *not to love* I am afraid but seldom differs in these cases from some degrees at least of really *bating* him. 'Tis at least a very partial and defective reconciliation, and shews the heart hath not thoroughly entered into the affair; for if the heart had really forgiven, the kind affections of the heart would return to their former channel, and the offender have his due share and interest in them. And in consequence of this,

There will be farther a disposition to shew him all the *proper instances of humanity and goodness*, and we shall prove the sincerity of our forgiveness, by all the answerable and genuine effects of it, and by all proper and prudent expressions of esteem and confidence; an hearty forgiveness replaces the offender in the same situation he was in before the offence committed. If the trespass was committed by one friend to another, acknowledgment and reparation on the one part, and forgiveness on the other, should entirely make up the breach, and more firmly cement the friendship than ever; and there should be no jealousy in one whether the acknowledgment was sincere, nor in the other whether the forgiveness was hearty and entire. If the breach was between a superior and dependent, the superior should continue his usual offices of kindness, and be ever ready to lend his assistance as though there had been no offence; and the dependent replace the same confidence in him, and pay him the same observance and service, as though the mutual tie had never been broken. If the offence was between persons that had no other connections but the common ties of human nature, and the mutual engagements of business; the civilities and confidence arising from such connections should again take place, and no remembrance of former injuries and displeasure should interrupt and destroy them.

I have been speaking under all those particulars of that forgiveness which is the effect
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of real or professed repentance. What the conduct of Christians should be, where the case is different, and the offender not returned to his duty, will be shewn under the next head. And with respect to the case before us, when the offender professes his repentance, there is need frequently of great prudence and caution in the management of ourselves, and we are to take care that we do not suffer credulity and false appearances to deceive us, as well as not to let passion and resentment govern us.

There are some offences of that nature, and aggravated with such circumstances, as will for ever *cancel* all future confidence and trust; and may be carried on with that art, fraud, and perfidy, and may be attended with effects so prejudicial to our honour, peace, and welfare; as that though we may so far forgive them, as not to revenge ourselves, or prosecute him that doth them to the extremity of deserved punishment; yet it may be highly imprudent and prejudicial to our reputation, even to have any farther concern with them, or to profess any intimacy or friendship with them. Particular friendships are matters of choice and not of duty, and as there are very good reasons that may keep us from entering into them, with many persons that may be desirous of it, so there may be as just ones for breaking them off with those with whom we formerly contracted them. And as 'tis prudence that must always govern us, in the choice of those with whom we are to transact

the necessary affairs of life, we must judge by that prudence, and the nature of the injuries we have received from others, how far we can with safety replace the usual confidence in them; and if *prudence* forbids us to do it, we are certainly at liberty to consult our conveniency and interest. And as we are free in things of mere favour, the withdrawing those favours from some, and making others the objects of them, must be determined by our own discretion, provided it be not the direction dictated by incurable resentment, anger and malice. I will only say, that generally speaking, the more kind, affectionate, and generous we are towards those we profess to forgive, we shew in proportion the sincerity of our forgiveness, and more effectually triumph over ourselves and them; and that one would oftentimes chuse to do the most good-natured and friendly offices to those who have offended us, to secure them to our interest by principles of duty and stronger gratitude, and to taste that peculiar satisfaction and pleasure that arises, and that can arise from no other source but the forgiving spirit, and *overcoming the evil of others with our good.*

Prudence is also to direct us, as to the *season and time*, and in what *measures and degrees* we are to restore persons who have offended us, to our affection, at least to our confidence and trust. Could we discern the heart, that itself would be an infallible direction; and if we saw that the repentance was

was sincere, the instant replacing the offender in our affection and confidence would be our duty. But as this doth not come within our cognizance, prudence, and a just regard to our welfare, may sometimes direct us, to make the proper trial of the sincerity of his repentance, and wait for some substantial proofs of it; to remark his general conduct towards others, and his behaviour towards ourselves; especially if the offence hath been great, and attended with any peculiar aggravations. Lesser injuries should be immediately, upon acknowledgment, entirely cancelled, and cause no distance or alteration of the friendly conduct. In cases that are more extraordinary, though we ought, upon the professions of repentance, entirely to forgive; yet I think we ought to be so cautious and just to ourselves, as on many occasions to act by steps and degrees, and gradually to restore the offender to our full favour; that we may not by an hasty, ill-placed confidence, put it into his power farther to injure and abuse us, and through our means to deceive and offend others. And,

Farther, as Christian forgiveness is thus sincere and entire, so 'tis *unwearied*, and *triumphs* over *numerous* and *repeated* offences. Thus in my text: *If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying: I repent: Thou shalt forgive him.* In St. Matthew our blessed Saviour urges this in a stronger manner. For when Peter came to him, and said: *Lord, how oft*
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shall

shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times. Jesus said to him: *I say not unto thee, only until seven times, but until seventy times seven*; and shews the reasonableness of this precept by a parable that carries in it the noblest illustration of the duty, and the necessity of complying with it, in which he represents a certain *king as forgiving one of his servants ten thousand talents*; and that servant is inexorable to his fellow-servant, and throwing him into gaol for not being able to pay him a poor *hundred pence*, and as being punished by his Lord for his relentless cruelty, and not shewing to another the mercy he received himself. The duty indeed of always forgiving upon repentance is rational in itself, and may be demonstrated to be so by the most certain principles. For if the profession of repentance be ever a reason for forgiveness, 'tis always so; and the question is not, How often any one offends, but whether he is sensible of his offence, and professes his sorrow for it. If that be in any case a proper motive for forgiveness, it is, when alike circumstanced, a proper motive in every case. The expression of *seven times*, and *seventy times seven* is evidently proverbial, and puts a certain number of times for an uncertain. And the meaning is, that repentance always intitles to forgiveness, how numerous and repeated soever mens offences may be; and that 'tis always wrong to be implacable and unforgiving. But it may be said, that when mens offences become so numerous, they are a forfeiture

feiture of forgiveness: But if this holds good as to those who have offended us, it holds good in the mouths of those whom we have offended, and may be particularly urged against us by Almighty God, whom I am afraid we have all offended more than seventy times seven, and that the trespasses of our neighbour against us will be in proportion to ours against God, but as *one hundred pence to a thousand talents*; and therefore let us not prejudice ourselves against a plain duty by an argument, which if alledged against us, will for ever exclude us from the forgiveness of God.

But it may be said, that to sin *so often*, shews the *insincerity* of the repentance professed, and therefore is a forfeiture of the forgiveness. But remember, that the *last* profession of repentance *may be sincere*, and that it is better to forgive seventy-six times where the profession of repentance hath not been genuine, than not to forgive the seventy-seventh time, if the acknowledgment that once should happen to be honest and sincere. Not to add, that this is a way of reasoning, that I suppose no man would willingly have applied to his own case, or urged against him at an higher tribunal than any human, and therefore should not be brought by any one as an exception to a plain, rational, and important duty. Men may be very sincere in their repentance for their faults; and yet through weakness and infirmity, through want of knowledge and due attention may afterwards fall into the

same, or others, that may need much indulgence and forbearance. And when they are not committed with propense malice, rancour of heart, and a real design to aggrieve and offend; but through the mere imperfection of human nature; as all such offences are in some respects involuntary, so how often soever they are repeated, they are to be as often overlooked upon the proper submission, and forgiven in consequence of a professed repentance. *Revelation* carries us up *seventy times seven*, and true *reason* teaches us, that the exercise of all the humane benevolent affections is *at all seasons* proper, and ever attended with the most grateful and sensible satisfaction. But

7. Lastly, if the *offender* continue *insensible* of his fault, or *too proud* and *obstinate* to acknowledge and amend it; and by thus refusing to do justice to those he hath injured, declares himself an *enemy*; what is the rule of reason and revelation in such a case? What, that we should forgive him? That is no where commanded us; nor doth it appear reasonable in itself at all times, or practicable in all circumstances, in that extensive sense in which I have explained forgiveness; and especially as it implies a restoration to confidence and trust, which it is impossible for any one to do in a declared and professed enemy. Our Saviour hath wisely determined our conduct in this respect. *Let him be to thee as an beaten man or a publican*; which words are to be considered not as a *precept*, but a *permission*; for

for we may certainly do more for an enemy than he deserves; and our blessed Lord doth not discountenance the freest exercise of the most generous benevolence. However, he rightly permits us no longer to consider him as a friend and a brother, but to treat him as one that hath forfeited his claim to both. *Let him be to thee, as an beaten man and a publican. i. e.* Break off all intimacy and friendship with him, have as few concerns to manage with him as you can, beware of him, and shun him as an unjust person, and whenever it is necessary, and can be done with safety, caution others against him, that they may not be deceived and injured by him. Thus the *Jews* treated *beaten men* and *publicans*. They did not consider them as neighbours and brethren, nor acknowledge them as members of the same religious society, nor look upon themselves as obliged to do the same kind and friendly services for them as for others, nor to cultivate the same intimacy with and affection for them, nor to give them the same marks and proofs of their confidence and esteem.

But nevertheless *publicans* and *sinners* were *men*, though oftentimes bad men; and there was a duty to them; and though there was no obligation to consider them as *intimates* and *friends*, the obligation remained in full force to consider and treat them as *men*, and by consequence not to divest ourselves of humanity towards them, not to set them as objects of an incurable hatred, and pursue them with

an unrelenting spite and bitterness and malice. In like manner an offender that is intractable, that will not yield to reason, nor bend to persuasion, is a man, though an enemy; and though he forfeits the regard due to a *brother*, by no means forfeits that which is due to *human nature*, and which arises out of the common ties that subsist between, and unite the whole human species. And accordingly our blessed Saviour prescribes those duties towards him, which are reasonable in themselves, and perfectly consistent with the treating him in other respects as an *beathen* and *publican*. Particularly

He commands us to *love our enemies* †. *I say unto you love your enemies*. Not surely in the same manner, and in the same degree as we love just and good men, as we love our benefactors, and cherish towards our brethren and intimates. But love him, as that stands opposed to malice and hatred, to ill-will and a steady resolution to pursue him to his destruction, and to the endeavour to recompense evil for evil. Love him so, as to maintain a readiness to perform every necessary duty towards him, and as shall excite us to do every kind office for him, that may be fit for us to do, and that he can have any right to demand from us. 'Tis evident our blessed Lord by putting him, and allowing us to put him in the rank of publicans and sinners, commands us to maintain such a love and

† Matt. v. 44.

affection for him, as ought to subsist between the whole species, which is *sincere*, though not *equally* warm and fervent as what particulars have a right to claim, where the relation is more near, and the obligation more peculiar.

And in consequence of this love, we are to pray for our enemies, even for the most iniquitous and injurious of them. *Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you †.* We are to pray for them that God would recover them to a better mind and conduct, reclaim them from their sin, and forgive them the injuries they have done us, and vouchsafe them every blessing that may be necessary for their happiness. If they *curse us* and wish us ill, that is their sin and their fault; and we must not imitate their sin, and revenge ourselves by cursing and imprecating the judgments of God on their heads ||. *Bless and curse not*, is our rule. *Bless them which persecute you, bless and curse not †; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but rather blessing; for hereunto are we called, that we should inherit a blessing §.* And more than this:

We are not only to *bless them*, as that implies the praying for them that God would bless them, but to *do them actually good*, in all instances where prudence and self-defence will permit and allow us to do it. *Do good to them that hate you **; especially in all such instances as are necessary to their preservation.

† Mat. v. 44. || Ibid. † Rom. xii. 14. § 1 Pet. iii. 9.
* Luke vi. 27.

and safety. There was an hostile, incurable enmity that subsisted between the *Jews* and *Samaritans*. But our blessed Saviour absolutely disapproved it, and shews by the parable of the *Samaritan* †, that no differences, nor personal animosities, nor national prejudices and enmities, should be allowed to operate so strongly, as to cause us to deny our friendly assistance to any kind of persons in extream danger; but that we should readily run to their assistance, and afford them all the help we can for their recovery and safety. And agreeable to this rule St. *Paul* advises ‡: *If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink*. Relieve him under his pressing necessities; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head; either melt him down by thy goodness into repentance and a better disposition, or by thine abundant kindness, if he remains incurable in his enmity, expose him to the severest punishment from God. The former seems to be rather the meaning of the Apostle: Thou shalt burn up and destroy all the seeds of enmity in his breast, by thus heaping benefits, like coals of fire, on his head; because he immediately adds: *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*. And lastly,

We are to maintain a constant disposition to forgive and receive him to our favour, and to encourage every good disposition in him to return to his duty. When the good father saw

† Luke x. 30, &c.

‡ Rom xii. 20.

the prodigal son a great way off, he ran and embraced him, to shew us that we are to meet the offender, and readily enter into any reasonable terms of accommodation; and even in many instances to abate of the rigour and strict justice of our demands for the sake of peace, and not to insist on the uttermost farthing. This our Lord shews the necessity of in the parable, where *the king forgave the servant the ten thousand talents,* and afterwards severely punished him for throwing his fellow-servant into prison, till he should pay the whole debt that he owed him; to signify to us, how unnatural in itself and how displeasing to God, the rigorous, exacting, relentless disposition is; and how in all cases of offence, mercy must temper justice, and even our righteous demands be mitigated by mercy and goodness. And as this is reasonable in its own nature, so 'tis enforced by many peculiar motives in the gospel revelation. I can now only add:

How *amiable* is that disposition and spirit which is recommended by the religion and gospel of Christ. We are all in the *first* place engaged to the utmost care *not to offend* our brother, or in any instance whatsoever to aggrieve or injure him. But as 'tis scarce possible that all offences can be avoided, the *offender* is required instantly to make the *proper acknowledgment*, and *compensate* as far as he can the injuries he hath done; and the *offended* person immediately to *forgive him*, and that *from the heart*. If men that do ill will avow
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and persist in it, and continue in a state of enmity towards us, how kindly are we guarded against entering into the same spirit, and suffering their follies to prove to us an occasion of our sin. For if my enemy sins against God by cherishing an implacable enmity against me, I am guilty of an equal sin in suffering as incurable an hatred in my own breast towards him. His being *first* in the crime is no reason for my *following* him, and is no excuse for me that I am become a *second* in it. Christianity doth indeed allow us to treat men as they are, and put a difference between them, according to their different dispositions and characters, and doth not oblige us to the same warmth of affection, and the same kind expressions of love towards friends and enemies. But its great design is to teach us the rules of reason and prudence and equity, in all the various circumstances of our being; and it offers us the most powerful motives to subdue all those irregular, immoderate, blind, and headstrong passions, that never prevail, without leading men into great errors and irregularities; and wholly to extirpate all those sensual, fierce, brutal, and diabolical affections, which argue the utmost perversion of human nature, lead men into the most destructive courses, and are the abhorrence of God and all good men. And by extirpating these out of the mind, it opens the door for the entrance of all humane, kind, benevolent, social, godlike affections, and for the exercise of those moderate,

derate, calm, gentle, peaceful passions, that are pleasing to God, productive of a thousand good fruits wherever they prevail, and amply reward, by innumerable pleasures, the mind which cultivates them; preserves it free from inward tempests and storms, from being ruffled and agitated by external accidents, from losing the possession of itself by the indiscretions, follies, and ill conduct of others, and from forfeiting its own happiness to gratify the ill will and malicious endeavours of those who hate us. Religion is the art, and contains the true secret of *being happy ourselves*, and *rendering happy all those about us*; and wheresoever the true principles and spirit of it prevail, extirpates all the seeds of misery, and implants and cultivates all the substantial causes of the most rational felicity; as it fills the mind with all those dispositions that are the only sources of true enjoyment, and excites to the practice of all those virtues that are commendable in the sight of God and man; and thus renders him a blessing to himself, and makes his life a very valuable blessing to all around him. And though I hope this doctrine of the forgiveness of injuries and the doing good for evil, and the loving our enemies, doth not immediately suit the case of many, of most of you, and that you have no animosities and enmities subsisting between you and others, yet let not even such think the subject is unprofitable. The great moral that all of us should learn from it is, that we should endeavour
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after the most inoffensive behaviour, labour to correct any irregularity of temper, to keep a perpetual restraint upon all our passions, and to *clothe ourselves with that humility and meekness*, and to put on that benevolent spirit, that kind, generous, patient, forgiving disposition, that shall at least secure us our peace, and effectually preserve us from interrupting the peace of others. Heaven is a state where the angry passions have no place, and malice, hatred and revenge obtain only amongst the *out-casts* of Heaven and Glory. Let us not wear those genuine marks of reprobation, nor indulge those criminal affections which are natural causes of the most substantial misery. But as *God is love*, let us *walk in love*, and follow the example of him *who loved us and gave himself for us*; who loved us when we were *enemies*, and died for us that he might reconcile us to God. If the same spirit dwell in us that did in him, the spirit of benevolence and love, he will own us as his genuine disciples, and give us hereafter an abundant entrance into that happy world that hath no variance to disturb the peace of it, but where all the inhabitants are for ever united by the bonds of an inviolable affection and love.

S E R M O N XIX.

The Scripture Doctrine of Repentance.

MATT. ix. 13.

*I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners
to repentance.*

THESE are the words of our blessed Lord, in vindication of himself, for keeping company and conversing with publicans and sinners. The Pharisees saw this, and were grievously offended at it, and said to his disciples, *why eateth your master with publicans and sinners* * ? To this our Lord answers: *They that are whole need not a physician but they that are ill.* Their being sinners is the very reason of my conversing with them. They need my help, and are objects of compassion. *Go ye and learn what that means:* Learn the true sense of that passage of scripture, and then blame me if you can. *I will have mercy and not sacrifice. i. e.* When these two interfere, and sacrifice cannot be offered without omitting the exercise of mercy, I

* Ver. 11.

then

then command the exercise of mercy to be preferred, and sacrifice to be omitted for the sake of it. And the application of this passage is. I allow that familiarly to converse with notorious sinners, as intimates and friends, is not becoming the character of a great and good man, and that such converse with them is generally to be avoided; but that however there are cases, in which this general rule of prudence must give way, and that the conversing with bad men is not to be so universally refused, as to omit any fair opportunities of doing them good. To recover them from their vices, and to bring them to a better spirit and life, is a work of great mercy and goodness, always right in itself, and acceptable to God; and therefore, though converse with notorious sinners be not eligible in itself, and not generally to be indulged; yet it is lawful in itself, and what God will approve, to embrace every opportunity of converse with them, by which their repentance and reformation may be promoted and effected. And this was the more fit and proper in our blessed Lord, one principal part of whose office and duty it was, as he expresses it in my text, *to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* In speaking to which words I shall consider,

I. *The nature of repentance, as represented in scripture.*

II. *Who are the persons to whom the scripture call of repentance is directed.*

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I. I am to consider the *nature of repentance*, as represented to us in the sacred writings. I have from another subject mentioned to you, that the original word rendered in the New Testament *repentance*, signifies an *after thought*, or the *change of the inward sense and state of the mind*. And because this alteration of the *mind* naturally produces a correspondent alteration and change of *actions*, hence also the gospel repentance includes in it a suitable change of the behaviour and life.

1. *Repentance*, according to the scripture account of it, and the primary sense of the word, denotes the *inward change of the state and temper of the mind*. The original word is used in this sense by profane writers, as well as in the New Testament, and the gospel repentance necessarily implies this, as an essential part of it. *Repent*, saith God by the prophet to the Jews*, *make ye a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel*. And every exhortation to repentance throughout the whole sacred writings, implies the universal change of the man in his whole moral state and character, as well in all the internal principles and motives of action, as in the habitual course of the actions themselves.

Repentance, as will be shewn you, is the proper duty of *sinners*, of men whose hearts have been set within them to do evil, and who have been guilty of those presumptuous sins

* Ezek. xviii. 30, 31.

that are inconsistent with the favour of God, and expose them to the just effects of his displeasure. And as all such kind of sins proceed from a bad disposition and habit of mind, repentance begins, and the foundation of it is laid in the change of this; or in the prophet's language, *in making us a new heart, and a new spirit*; not in the *literal*, but *moral* sense of the expression. As no man can change his fleshy heart, so neither can he the powers and faculties of his mind and spirit. These remain the same after repentance as before. But he can change the bias and tendency, the temper and state of his passions, the nature of his habits, his taste and relish of things, his principles and motives of conduct, his convictions and sentiments, his judgment of the nature and consequences of his own actions, so that in all these things, he shall become quite a new person, and as different from his former self as though he had undergone a new creation, and was thereby formed into quite another person than he was before; which is what the Apostle calls *putting off the old man which is corrupt, according to deceitful lusts* ‡; or that former moral disposition and character rendered corrupt and vicious by the evil lusts and passions that formed it; and on the contrary, *being renewed in the spirit of his mind**, and *putting on that new man, that new habit and character, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness* †.

‡ Eph. iv. 22. • Ver. 23. † Ver. 24.

And indeed no man is more changed or different from himself, than an *habitual sinner* become a *real* and *sincere penitent*. For the alteration in his inward disposition and state is indeed universal, and reaches to all the powers and passions that are within him. View him antecedent to his repentance,

You will find him either in a state of miserable *ignorance*, or under the possession of extremely *false* and *corrupt principles*, or else *holding the truth in unrighteousness*, by wilfully opposing the best principles he believes. But if his repentance be sincere, and the change of his mind implied in it be real and universal, he hath discarded the corrupt principles he formerly embraced, according to our Lord's advice to the church of *Pergamos*: *Thou hast them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate**. Repent, reject these false and corrupt doctrines, and purge them wholly out of the midst of thee. Instead of these, they are brought to the knowledge and belief of the great doctrines of godliness, or in St. Paul's language, *God hath given them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth†*, so changed them from their former ignorance, or from their corrupt prejudices and errors, as to embrace the pure and heavenly doctrines of Christianity.

If the *motives* that govern and influence his conduct as a sinner be considered, they will be found extremely *criminal* and *unworthy*, or

* Rev. ii. 15, 16.

† 2 Tim. ii. 25.

mean and *low*, and unsuitable to the dignity of his rational nature, and to that eternal duration, for which the great author of his being hath intended him; such as the indulging his passions, and gratifying his sensual inclinations, some object merely external, and that is relative to the body, and the interests only of the present life. But if his mind be changed as a true penitent's is, he lives by the *powers of religion* and the *life to come*, by principle, conscience, sense of duty, regard to the inspection, and hope of the acceptance of God.

How great is the difference in his *approbations* and *aversions*? As an habitual sinner against God, the pleasures of sin were the most grateful, and his chief delight consisted in making provision for the flesh, to gratify the lusts thereof. The restraints of religion were his aversion, and all exercises of a spiritual nature tedious and burthensome. As changed by repentance, these pleasures of sin are his abhorrence, and he hates every thing that corrupts his mind, disaffects him to his duty, is inconsistent with his obligations, and that tends to indispose him for rational happiness. The *good and acceptable and perfect will of God* he approves in all its requirements and largest extent; conformity to him he looks on as the highest dignity of his nature; he hath the most *pleasing relish* of the sacred exercises of *piety and devotion*, and is then most satisfied with himself, when he hath discharged a *good conscience* towards God, and hath been most seriously

seriously employed in obeying his will, and securing his favour.

How different is the *judgment* he passeth upon *himself*, the *nature* and *consequences* of his *actions*, his projects and pursuits, his *state* and *condition* in virtue of this inward change of mind that true repentance implies? Prejudiced by false opinions, viewing things in the bad light in which his passions represent them, and blinded through partiality and self-love, he concludes his vices are harmless, promises himself safety and impunity in indulging them, looks upon good or evil only as it affects the present life, and on future distant and invisible objects as comparatively uncertain, and not worthy to be compared with, or preferred to things sensible and present. The doctrines of religion appear to him at best doubtful, the restraints of it grievous, the duties of it burthensome, and the rewards of it altogether uncertain. And therefore he determines within himself to pursue the advantages of the present life, and the enjoyments of sense, as the great business that deserves his care, and the only sources of certainty and importance, that will supply his happiness, and reward his labours. But in how different a light doth he discern things, how contrary the judgment he passes on them, when he hath this *new heart and new spirit*, that is included in repentance. When once his prejudices are removed, and things appear to him in their proper nature, and genuine colours, when every deception is removed, and every false representation clearly

seen through, his vices appear to him odious and detestable, cloathed with substantial guilt, infinitely dangerous in their consequences, and as leading him to and preparing for the most aggravated destruction. When he considers them as immediate offences against the authority, government, and will of God, as forbidden by his law, as contrary to his rectitude, and as subversive of that order and peace which he would have established and preserved in the world; he hath then the strongest conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of its being the great evil, which is of all others the most offensive and displeasing to the supreme Lord and governor of the world, and which the perfection of his nature, and character, as the righteous ruler of the rational creation, renders an object worthy of his abhorrence and punishment. When he seriously reflects on the immediate effects it hath on himself, in debasing his nature, corrupting the state of his mind, disordering and perverting his affections, introducing criminal habits, enslaving him to mean and mischievous passions, rendering him incapable of the best satisfactions, the wisest actions, and the worthiest pursuits of life, alienating him from God, rendering him averse to converse with him, and unfit for the happiness of enjoying him; when he considers it as a refusal of his grace, a contempt of his salvation, a grieving of his Spirit, and an opposition to the calls of his mercy, and all the powerful motives and persuasives of his goodness by Jesus Christ.

His

His judgment stands fully convinced in this view of things, that sin is the great comprehensive evil, and includes in it every thing that is base and vile, and that is mischievous and destructive to human nature, and to all the best and dearest interests of it. And in consequence of this, how severe is the censure he passeth on his former actions and course of life? When he calls himself to the tribunal of his own conscience, and suffers this inward principle to award the proper sentence, how readily doth he condemn himself for his disobedience, ingratitude, and irreverence to God? For want of affection to, for contempt of, and unthankfulness to his Lord and Saviour? For obstinacy and perverseness, for stupidity and presumption in his former course of life? For the neglect of his best interest, and sacrificing the peace and pleasures of a good conscience for *pleasures that perish in the using*; and bartering away all the fair prospects of the eternal world for a mere empty shadow of good, and enjoyments not only transitory, but criminal and destructive. And in consequence of this sense of things, the judgment he passes on his own condition, as an unreclaimed impenitent sinner is, that he is thus far ruined and undone, an object of the divine displeasure, and exposed to all those threatnings and punishments that are uttered against and reserved for all the unrighteous and ungodly in a future world. And now the principles, the temper, the life of religion, all appear to him rational, desir-

able, and of all other things truly prudential. An awakened conscience, an altered judgment, give reality and importance to future invisible objects. The practice and behaviour of the good man appears wise and safe. The restraints to which he voluntarily subjects himself, all rational, and conducive to his true interest. His views only worthy to be entered into, his pursuits to be imitated and followed, his pleasures only worthy, substantial and permanent, his state only desirable and safe, and his end alone unquestionably happy.

From this great and universal alteration of *judgment*, what must be the workings of his own *heart* and *affections* within him? 'Tis impossible his sentiments can be thus entirely altered, and that he can view himself in the evil, dangerous light, in which conscience represents him, without feeling in his own breast the most uncomfortable struggle and conflict of various uneasy passions within him. Nature and revelation agree in such as these;

A suitable and becoming *grief and sorrow* of mind. A wrong conduct in any instance of life, will be productive of this, more or less; and it especially arises in the breasts of ingenuous persons, when they are sensible of their having done any thing inconsistent with integrity and a good character, and it is a sure ingredient in the religious repentance, which Christ came into the world to call sinners to the exercise of. Thus under the Old Testament *Ephraim* bemoaned himself. *Surely, saye he, after that I was turned, I repented, and after*

after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh †, viz. in the anguish of my heart, and the agony of my vexation and trouble. And St. Paul speaks of *sorrowing to repentance, after a godly manner* *, or as the literal rendering of the words run, with a sorrow according to God, such a sorrow as God requires, approves, and will accept, or such a sorrow as arises from the sense of having offended and dishonoured him by sin, forfeited his favour, and exposed ourselves to his anger. Such a sorrow is the natural effect of this change of mind, 'tis a proper expression and proof of the reality of it, it argues tenderness and ingenuity of disposition, it shews a becoming sense of our wrong behaviour towards God, and a *contrite spirit* upon account of it, and is therefore a *sacrifice with which God is well pleased*. And if the sins of men have been aggravated by any peculiar circumstances of guilt, by the heinous nature of them, the number and frequent repetitions of them, the length of our continuance in them, and our obstinacy in opposing all the means and motives to recover and reclaim us; there should be a proportionable sorrow and humiliation upon the account of them. Thus Job, when come to himself, recovered from his impatience, and sensible how undeserved his censures of God's providence had been, cries out: *I repent in dust and ashes* †. With the most submissive sorrow I stand con-

† Jer. xxxi. 19.

* 2 Cor. vii. 9.

† Job xlii. 6.

victed of my sin, and declare my most deep and unfeigned repentance. And our Saviour tells the *Jews*, that if *those mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, that had been done in Chorazin and Bethsaida, they would have repented in dust and ashes* †; manifested the deepest humiliation and grief for their offences.

This sorrow for sin will be accompanied with a *conscious shame*, and *inward confusion of mind*. *I repented, saith Ephraim, I smote upon my thigh, I was ashamed, yea even confounded* †; or as he elsewhere expresses it: *We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God* ||. And in this very chapter the Prophet reproaches the *Jews* with their hardness and impudence in vice, because they had overcome all sense of shame in sinning. *Thou hast a whore's forehead, thou refusest to be ashamed* §. When sinners are arrived to this maturity and obduracy in vice, as to be able to commit their excesses, and reflect on their crimes with a steady countenance and unmoved heart, without confusion in their breast, or a blush to redden their countenance; they seem to be so far gone in wickedness, and abandoned as to every thing decent and modest, as to leave but little room for hope of their being ever reclaimed and converted. The *Publican* in the temple stood afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast *; all of

† Matt. xi. 21. † Jer. xxxi. 19. || Jer. iii. 25. § Ver. 3.
* Luke xviii. 13.

them

them tokens of the sense of his own unworthiness, and the inward shame and confusion of his breast upon account of it. And indeed there is such a natural turpitude and evil in sin, as that there is no object so vile in its nature, or so dishonourable to him that commits it. It spreads contagion and infamy wheresoever 'tis harboured, and defiles every thing that touches it. Nothing is a real dishonour to any man without this; nor any honour pure and entire, that is purchased by or possessed with this. And therefore as 'tis a disreputable, foul and infamous thing in its nature, the consciousness of it, in a mind not wholly perverted, will excite an inward confusion, and often cover the face with a blush, even when we are present only with God and ourselves, and there is no human eye to discover us.

In consequence of this there will be *self-
abhorrence*, or a real hatred of our past character and conduct, as a thing worthy our aversion, and as yielding a prospect extremely disagreeable and odious. Thus *Job*: *Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee* *? *Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes* †. A corrupt heart and a bad life, are amongst those objects that are intrinsically and unalterably displeasing to the eye and judgment of reason, which cannot discern them without uneasiness and pain, and from which they turn away as from what is

* *Job* xl. 4.† *Job* xlii. 6.

offensive. And 'tis impossible for any one, who views moral objects and characters as reason and revelation represent them, to be conscious that he himself is destitute of all moral worth, that he hath been long the slave of vile and infamous passions, and engaged in the low, unmanly, brutal pursuits of a merely sensitive life, neglecting his honour, duty and true interest, offending his God, injuring his neighbour, and destroying himself: I say 'tis impossible that any man can have a clear, strong, habitual conviction of all this, without the most hearty detestation of his former self, and looking upon his past character and conduct with the utmost displeasure and hatred.

And this will be attended farther with a *becoming resentment* and *indignation* for the part we have acted, and the dispositions and habits we have cherished. We can I believe none of us see in another person, an extremely bad conduct, full of folly, desperately mad, highly ungrateful, exceedingly abusive, and made up of all the worst errors and crimes of human nature; without the most entire disapprobation, and passing the severest censure on it that a warm indignation can possibly suggest. But why all this indignation against the follies and crimes of *others*, and none against *ourselves* when chargeable with the guilt of them? Folly retains its nature in whomsoever she dwells, and the character of sin is immutably the same who ever commits it. And therefore if they possess our
minds,

minds, and our lives are governed by their counsels, we are as just objects of anger and indignation, as any others can be on the same accounts; and if the change of our minds by repentance be sincere, we cannot but conceive the utmost displeasure against our former selves, and be highly offended for the many aggravated errors of our lives.

Nor will the mind on such a conviction and view of things be able to preserve itself free from those *fears and terrors*, which arise out of the consciousness of sin, and are suggested by the principles of true religion. The pleasures of vicious men are frequently interrupted by uneasy suspicions, jealousies and apprehensions of an after reckoning and punishment. Conscience will distress them, if they will converse with, and give it liberty to speak; and for this reason they seldom choose to be alone with so restless and troublesome a companion, and for their own ease often wish they could divest themselves of that consciousness, which is one of their principal distinctions above the brutal creation. But these fears are more sensible, lively and habitual, when they are the effect of repentance, and result from the change of the mind, in all its moral perceptions, convictions and apprehensions of things. Sin, when acknowledged to be an immediate offence against God, as having the *wages of death* annexed to it, and as laying us open to all the everlasting effects of the divine displeasure; sin when viewed as thus attended, opens the mind
to

to the strongest impressions of fear, calls up to view the most substantial and formidable terrors, and renders the heart incapable of possessing itself in peace, whilst its apprehension of this complicated danger continues, and 'tis destitute of that sacred relief that flows from the well grounded hope of mercy and forgiveness. Nor are there any considerations that have such power to awaken those distressing terrors in the minds of men, as those suggested to the mind by the principles of religion. And as 'tis absolutely impossible to disprove those principles, 'tis highly absurd to ridicule or neglect the impressions fastened on the mind upon account of them; and he who is hardy enough to destroy, to despise and triumph over the fears of God and a future judgment, and goes about to get rid of them any other way than by amendment and conversion, acts a mad and desperate part, and not what reason and prudence suggest; because whilst we act contrary to the obligations of religion and virtue, there will ever be reason for the deepest fear; and the more we think of our own condition, and the more impartially we reason on it, the greater must our uneasiness and anxiety be.

The natural effect of such an anxiety, and arising from such important causes, as conviction of sin, quick sense of guilt, the forfeiture of happiness, and the impending vengeance of a righteous offended God, will be a warm and eager desire of preventing this accumulated misery, and a zealous concern to
guard

guard against the evils apprehended, and if possible to get into a safer and better state. For 'tis impossible that conscience can ever be easy when guilt stares it in the face, whilst it discerns the face of the Almighty God covered with frowns and terrors, and all the punishments of a future world impending, and knows not but the next hour, or day, or year, may bring this dreadful ruin home, and for ever involve the guilty offender in all the fatal consequences of it. At such a season, how fervent, how warm, how eager and passionate the desires of mercy and forgiveness! How natural the enquiry, How shall I escape this destruction! How shall I escape the wrath to come! Where shall I find a sure refuge from the anxieties that possess me, the shame that covers me, the terrors that feed on me, the vengeance that pursues me, and the eternal ruin that is before me! *What must I do to be saved? Is there no balm in Gilead? No physician there? No hand that can heal me, no art that can restore me to peace, no friendly guide to lead me out of this house of misery, and guide my feet into the way of safety and happiness! These are the objects that then of all others appear infinitely desirable; to those the most ardent wishes tend; for this deliverance the soul breathes, as the hunted hart pants for the refreshing streams of the water brook.* Thus the awakened jailor springs in trembling, falls down before his holy prisoners, and in the agonies of his terror, and with impatience of desire, cries out

out: *Sirs, what must I do to be saved**? And in such a situation of imminent danger, can the awakened sinner see any thing of like importance with salvation? Can any thing appear so desirable as mercy from God, and the being rescued from that danger which he sees every way surrounding him? Can he wish for a more necessary and valuable blessing, or wish with equal ardency for any thing, as reconciliation to his God, and the being restored to his favour?

This zeal and fervency of repenting desire will excite the thought of that *noble revenge*, which is one of the most excellent parts of the Christian character, that we should all cherish in our breasts, and which is the only kind of revenge we can indulge to with innocence and safety, and which gives the most exquisite kind of pleasure, when once we have wrought and fully executed it; that *revenge upon ourselves*, i. e. *our corrupt passions, affections and habits*, that have betrayed us into this ruin, and deceived us into this state of pain and misery; that revenge on them, which consists in an *eternal hatred* of them, a *constant opposition* to them, a *daily mortification* of them, a *fixed resolution* wholly to *destroy* and *extirpate* them out of our breast. This is a revenge that cannot be too quick, too deep and lasting. 'Tis a revenge that mercy to ourselves calls for, that the principles of religion justify, and that everlasting consequences

* Acts xvi. 30.

of happiness shew necessary and prudent. These inward enemies, these invaders of our honour, these disturbers of our peace, these destroyers of our happiness, should have no compassion, no mercy shewn them. They have ruined us, and we should resolve their ruin. We should enter into no terms of composition with them, nor treat them with the least pity and indulgence. They are faithless treacherous enemies, in perpetual combination to undo us. When they smile on us and flatter us 'tis only that, under the guise of friendship, they may the more securely and effectually betray us, and lead us insensibly on to everlasting perdition. And therefore this is the revenge that we should take on them: O sin, I will be thy destruction! O thou treacherous and fatal evil, I will be thy plague! Repentance shall be for ever hid from mine eyes! Our breasts should be cleansed from every possible remainder of it, and each root of bitterness entirely extirpated, that there may not rise up a single fibre to corrupt and trouble us.

These thoughts I have been led to by that passage of St. *Paul* to the *Corinthians*, where describing their repentance, he mentions this variety of passions, that discovered themselves on this solemn occasion. *I rejoice*, says he, *not that ye were made sorry* †. Your grief as such was not the thing that gave me pleasure, *but that ye sorrowed to repentance*, or that yours

† 2 Cor. vii. 9.

was the sorrow of a genuine repentance ; for *ye sorrowed according to God*, because you had offended him, and therefore in that manner that was agreeable to his will. *For see, this very thing, your sorrowing according to God's will, what indignation it wrought in you, what fear, what earnest desire, yea what zeal, yea what revenge ! In every thing ye have approved yourselves pure or clear in this affair* † ; or by these proofs ye have discovered your repentance on this article, to be free from all deceit and hypocrisy. They shewed their *indignation* against the *crime* they had been chargeable with, their *fear* of the *divine displeasure*, and the Apostle's censure upon account of it, *their earnest desire* of obtaining the *forgiveness* of the offence, and of having the *sin wholly removed* from them, their *zeal* for being *restored* to the *acceptance and favour of God*, and the *good opinion* of the *Apostle* ; and their *revenge*, by the care they took to *cut off all occasions*, of the like sin for the future, and preserve themselves from these corruptions. Oh how many excellent dispositions are included in this important duty of gospel repentance ! What a change is here made in the state of the sinner's affections and passions ! Instead of their being, as once they were, all engaged in the interest of sin, they now become universally armed against it ; are engaged in a steady opposition to it, and all bend their united forces entirely to destroy it. Happy the sinner, who is thus changed

† 2 Cor. vii. 11.

from his former self, the current of whose affections is thus diverted into a different channel, and when they are all united in the struggle and contention for liberty, peace and salvation! That noble struggle God will prosper. His aiding grace, will secure the victory, and under his blessing and favour it shall become finally compleat, and appear in all its genuine and proper fruits. And this leads me

II. To the *second* thing, to consider that *external change* which *true repentance* implies, in consequence and as the effect of this inward alteration in the state and temper of the mind; for repentance, in the gospel account of it, implies the change of the *whole moral character*, and as it begins in the *heart*, reaches to the *life*, affects the whole conduct of it, and discovers itself invariably by its genuine answerable fruits. Hence *John* the Baptist, speaking to the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees*, exhorts them*: *Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance*; and *St. Paul* tells king *Agrippa* †, that in obedience to the heavenly vision, he shewed at *Jerusalem*, and throughout all the coasts of *Judea*, and to the Gentiles, that *they should repent and do works meet for repentance*; works worthy of and suitable to the nature of repentance. And here

I. The *first evidence* and proof of this inward change of the heart and mind in the

* Matt. iii. 8.

† Acts xxvi. 20.

finner is, *his ceasing to do evil*, his reformation from his former vices, and forsaking all the criminal practices, to which he may have formerly indulged. This is denoted in the scripture language; by his *turning from sin*. Thus God commands the Prophet to say to the house of Israel †: *Repent and turn from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations*; plainly intimating, that no repentance without this would be available for them, or acceptable to him. And this the Apostle expresses by *repentance from dead works* §, such a repentance as effectually recovers men from those evil works that argue men in a state of moral death, and that tend to and prepare for eternal death. And as all sin is offensive to God, and injurious to the souls of men, the turning from sin must be *entire and universal*, and not only from particular crimes, which men can part from with greater ease, as not having so strong a propensity to them, or habit of committing them. 'Tis the reformation from all sin which is the repentance God demands, *i. e.* from all wilful and presumptuous sin. Hear the declaration of God himself on this important article. *Repent and turn from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart, and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ||?* Plainly declaring, that unless they

† Ezek. xiv. 6. § Heb. vi. 1. || Ezek. xliii. 30, 31.

cast away all their former sins, their condemnation and ruin were unavoidable.

And indeed there can be no greater mistake than to imagine, that true repentance, such as God requires, is consistent with the love and practice of any known and wilful sin, or doth not oblige us to put away all the vanities of our former corrupt and evil conversation. Christ in my text is represented as the great physician. *They that are whole,* says he, *need not a physician, but they that are ill. I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.* Sin is that fatal distemper of the soul, that will without a speedy and effectual cure, prove the eternal destruction of it. To recover them from this evil was the principal end of our blessed Lord's mission into the world, and to restore them to health and soundness, to ease and peace of mind; and wherever he is submitted to, and the salutary prescriptions he hath directed faithfully made use of, the recovery from these moral disorders will be universal, and the salvation from wilful and presumptuous sins absolute and entire. And if our repentance consists in nothing else, but the confessing sin with our mouths, and some expressions of sorrow for having committed it, or certain ineffectual resolutions of forsaking it, whilst we still go on in the practice of it, or in turning only from some particular evil practices, whilst we allow ourselves habitually in others, we are, in the nature of the thing, and in the esteem of God, ob-

stinately impenitent; and there can be no greater proof that our repentance is defective in both the essential parts of it, the change of heart as well as life. For if *the tree is known by its fruit*, and the issues or various courses of men's lives are out of the heart, *i. e.* proceed from the prevailing habit and disposition of it, as they certainly do; than there can be no more demonstrative proof in the world, that the heart is not turned, than that the life is not changed; and you may as certainly conclude, from a man's continuing to practise his former sins, that the inward temper is corrupt, as you may judge of a bodily distemper by the constant symptoms of it, or conclude that fountain must be bitter, that is continually sending forth bitter and unwholesome waters. But

2. True repentance implies, not only the *turning from sin* and forsaking universally the practice of *every wilful and presumptuous one*, but, on the contrary, our sincere conversion and *turning unto God*. These things are connected in the sacred writings, as inseparable from one another. And they are so in the nature of the thing, every retreat from the paths of vice being a proportionable return to God, *i. e.* both to our duty to and happiness in him. Thus in the prophet *Jeremiah*, *Ephraim* prays*: *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, and after that I was turned I repented; turning unto God and repentance being equi-*

* Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

valent terms, or considered in the near connection of cause and effect. *After that I turned I repented.* When my prayer that God would turn me to himself was answered, then I knew my repentance was sincere. This is what St. Paul calls *repentance towards God* †, i. e. such a repentance as brings men to God; and the commission he received from Christ, was to shew both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, *that they should repent and turn to God* ‡. Upon this account we find that repentance is joined with conversion. Thus St. Peter to the *Jews*: *Repent ye and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out* ||; to shew that no professions of sorrow for sin; no abstinence from any of the grosser acts of it will be available to forgiveness, unless we turn to God as our author and end, our sovereign Lord and supream happiness. The great evil of sin consists in its alienating our hearts from him, and engaging the sinner in an habitual course of opposition to his authority and will. *For the carnal mind is enmity to God, it is not subject to him, neither indeed can be.* The very notion of it implies an immediate, direct opposition to the design of his providence, and the great end of his moral government; and though the hatred of God as an infinitely perfect being scarce seems possible to reasonable beings, infinite perfection being an object naturally attractive of veneration and love, yet nothing is more evident, than that determined, habitual sinners

† Acts xx. 21.

‡ Acts iii. 19,

|| Acts xxvi 20.

bate the law of God, because they hate the precepts and restraints of religion, which are the great laws of his kingdom, and all enforced by his supream authority ; and set up their criminal passions and sensual affections in opposition, which God hath commanded them to keep in subjection to the dictates of conscience, and the rules he hath given for the regulation and government of them. And therefore this return to God, which is included in the notion of gospel repentance, consists first in the real, thorough reconciliation of the heart to him, by acknowledging him as our proprietor and owner, our rightful, supream Sovereign and Lord, and reverencing, loving and adhering to him by prevailing affection, and steady resolution, as such ; and then as the natural fruit and effect hereof returning to our allegiance and duty to him, submitting ourselves to his will, and regulating our entire conduct for the future part of our lives by his holy and righteous laws. When our repentance is thus genuine we may know by comparing it with the *character* of a true repentance laid down in the holy scriptures, which I shall represent in a following discourse.

S E R M O N X X .

The Characters of True Repentance,
and of the Righteous.

MATT. IX. 13.

*For I am not come to call the righteous, but
sinners to repentance.*

THAT I might assist those who as sinners need repentance, in beginning and perfecting their repentance, I have described it as it begins and prevails in the *heart*, and in part as it evidences itself in the life. And to prevent any from deceiving themselves in this important affair, I shall now give the *principal marks* by which a genuine repentance is described in scripture, and distinguished from that which is insincere or defective.

Now the *marks* laid down in the holy scriptures of the *truth of repentance*, in this respect, are such as these.

1. The *acknowledgment of the truth*, the firm belief, and sincere profession of the great principles of religion, as to their certainty, importance, and obligation. Thus St. Paul exhorts

exhorts *Timothy*, in *meekness to instruct those that opposed themselves* to the gospel doctrine, *if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth**; such a repentance for their disbelief and opposition to the truth of the gospel, as should discover its sincerity, by their openly embracing, and steady adherence to it. And upon this account we find repentance and faith joined together, as essential parts of the Christian's character, and equally necessary to salvation. Thus *St. Paul* declares †, that he kept back nothing that was profitable to the elders of the *Ephesian* church, but shewed and taught them publicly, and from house to house, *repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*. And because in the primitive church those who were baptized made a short but public confession of their faith in Christ, antecedent to their baptism, hence *repentance* is joined with *baptism* ||. *Repent, faith Peter* to the *Jews*, and *be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ*; because as *St. Paul* expresses it in his epistle to the *Galatians* †: *As many of you as have been baptized, have put on Christ*; because they were baptized into him §; baptized into the faith of Christ's church, and the doctrines of his religion; and were therefore said by baptism to *put on Christ*, because they made, previously to the receiving it, an open and solemn confession of their believing in him, and so put on the distinguishing

* 2 Tim. ii. 25.

† Gal. iii. 27.

‡ Acts xx. 20, 21.

§ Rom. vi. 3.

|| Acts ii. 38.

character and habit of his disciples. And this is necessarily included in true repentance, and will be the certain effect of that internal change of sentiment and judgment, in which true repentance always begins. If we consider the prevailing original and cause of the habitual corruptions and great immoralities of mankind, we shall find it to be, a secret infidelity in the hearts of men, as to the principles of religion, and the great doctrines of Christianity. They have an *evil heart of unbelief, that causes them to depart from the living God*. Some are hardy enough openly to *deny* the great doctrines both of natural and revealed religion; others *suspect* the truth of them, and want that firm persuasion that is necessary to give them force and influence. Others, though they profess in general to believe them, yet have a *secret imagination and hope*, that though they do not live as those doctrines direct to do, yet they may *escape the punishment* threatened to sin, and obtain final salvation without holiness, by certain compositions, or by some kind of equivalent, that may be accepted in lieu of their repentance and reformation. 'Tis real unbelief, either as to the whole of religion, or some essential principles of it, or the indispensable necessity and obligation, as to the commanded duties of it, that is the genuine and constant source, of all the habitual and wilful vices, in which sinners indulge themselves. And therefore when men return to God by repentance, 'tis by returning to the truths of God, embracing the
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the doctrines of religion as taught by Christ, giving them entrance into their hearts, receiving them with love, *mixing them with faith*, and so impressing them on their minds and consciences, as to retain an habitual sense of their reality and importance, and govern their future conduct by the influence and direction of them.

2. Another *evidence and proof* of the sincerity of this return unto God, that is included in repentance, is *serious and fervent prayer* to him; and particularly prayer for *mercy and forgiveness*. Thus St. Peter exhorts *Simon the magician* †, after he had declared that he had no part nor lot in the gift of the holy Spirit: *Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray to God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee*. And after St. Paul's repentance and conversion to God, Christ gives this account of him to *Ananias*: *Behold he prayeth* †. And how natural an effect is this, of the reconciliation and return of the disaffected and alienated heart to God? How is it possible for the mind, when fully convinced in its most impartial and deliberate judgment, of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, as an offence against God, and an enmity to his authority and government; as ingratitude to him for all his favours, and an high abuse of the exceeding riches of his grace: I say, in such a situation of mind, how is it possible that the awakened sinner should for-

† Acts viii. 22.

† Acts ix. 11.

bear crying out: *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according to multitude of thy tender mercies blot out all my transgressions* *. When he considers his danger by reason of his past sins, and views the aggravated and endless destruction of a future world, to which he hath exposed himself, feels the terrors of God taking hold of him, and hath the awful apprehensions of falling under the effects of the divine displeasure; can the soul at such a season be so unconcerned for its own welfare, as not to lift up this ardent request to God: *Rebuke me not, O Lord, in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Return, O Lord, deliver my soul. Ob save me for thy mercies sake* ‡. When he experiences the power of sin within him, the hold it hath of his heart, and the influence it maintains over his passions, and the danger he is hereby in of returning to his former follies, and bringing himself under renewed guilt, he cannot help enquiring: *Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* Or cease to pray: *Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me* †. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. In such requests as these, the heart of the true penitent will naturally breathe towards God, as naturally as he is concerned for his own welfare, and to escape the most aggravated and

* Psal. li. 1. § Psal. vi. 1, 4. † Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24.

durable destruction. And there cannot be a more certain inference than this; that there can be no just conviction of, nor impartial judgment formed concerning the great evil of sin, where there is no prayer to God to be saved from the condemnation due to past sin, or to be delivered from the guilt and power of it for the future.

3. This return or conversion to God will farther discover itself, by the sinner's giving God glory, by a full and free acknowledgment of his own great unworthiness and demerits, by reason of sin, and the number and many aggravations of his offences. If there be a real and ingenuous concern of heart for having displeased him, there will be a voluntary confession of it, and a due humiliation of soul expressed upon account of it. When Achan was taken by lot, upon account of the accursed thing that was in his tent: *Joshua said to him †: My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him, and tell me now what thou hast done. Hide it not from me.* And when the fourth Angel poured forth his vial on the sun *, and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire, it is mentioned as the great aggravation of their sins under these judgments of God, that they blasphemed his name, and did not repent to give him glory, viz. by owning his judgments just and righteous, and confessing their impieties and vices, by which they had drawn

† Josh. vii. 19.

* Rev. xvi. 8, 9.

down these dreadful plagues on their own heads. This is what common reason dictates, and what one man naturally expects from another, that he should frankly own what he hath done amiss, as the first step towards reconciliation and forgiveness. And it is justly reckoned as an instance of very criminal obstinacy and perverseness, and to render those who are chargeable with it unworthy of all favour and pardon, to refuse to own their fault, and hereby make the proper submission to those whom they have offended. And therefore such obstinacy and impenitency towards God is much more criminal and dangerous, as his authority is supream, and the obligations we are under to do his will, and the things that please him, are infinitely stronger than any we can be under to any creatures whatsoever. Surely the least we can do, upon an impartial review of the nature and circumstances of our own manifold transgressions against him, is to *take with us words, and turn unto the Lord*, and say unto him †: *We acknowledge our transgressions, and our sin is ever before us. Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously* This argues real concern for sin, the sincere desire of restoration to the divine favour, the relenting of the heart, the return of it to God, and is *giving him the glory that is due to his name*. Because such confession of sin is an acknowledgment of his supream authority, of the rectitude of his

† Hof. xiv. 2.

nature, of the equity of his government, of the purity of his laws, of the folly, guilt and danger of offending him, of his constant inspection over us, and presence with us, of the dishonour done him by our sins, of the awful consequences of his anger, of the worth of his favour, and the absolute necessity of being recovered to it, in order to the safety and welfare of our beings. All this is implied in the humble contrite acknowledgment, which the awakened penitent makes of his offences against God, and by this he properly glorifies him, as he ascribes to him that glory which is his due, and vindicates the honour and justice, and holiness of his government. And this hath been the constant practice of all that have exercised a sincere repentance. Thus *David*, in the exercise of repentance in the matter of *Uriah*: *Against thee, thee only*, as my supreme Lord and Sovereign, *have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight* §. And the publican: *God be merciful to me a sinner* †. And the returning prodigal: *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son* †. And the Apostle *Paul*, even after he had obtained mercy: *I was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, the chief of sinners* ||. *I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the church of God* *. This is the language, these are the confessions before God, that true repentance will produce,

§ Psalm li. 4.

|| 1 Tim. i. 13—15.

† Luke xviii. 13.

* 1 Cor. xv. 9.

† Luke xv. 21.

suitable to the nature of mens offences, and the respective aggravations of their crimes, for which their own consciences reproach them. And lastly,

4. This return unto God, that is one essential part of the gospel repentance, implies in it, *sincere and universal obedience to God for the future*; without which no other expressions of it whatsoever will prove its sincerity, or profit those who may depend on it. This our blessed Lord represents to us as the effect of true repentance, in the *parable of the two sons*, one of whom, upon his father's saying to him, *Son, go work to day in my vineyard*, answered and said, *I go Sir, but went not* †; the other upon receiving the same command, replied, *I will not, but afterwards repented and went*; shewed that he changed his mind, and was convinced that he had done wrong, by actually obeying, and doing the thing that his father commanded him; to represent to us, that repentance is made perfect by future obedience, and that no professions of submission, no fair promises and speeches that we can make to God, that are ineffectual and unperformed, will ever be regarded by him, or secure to us his approbation and favour. And this is the proper meaning of that exhortation of *John Baptist* to the *Jews*, who came to be baptized of him ||: *Bring forth fruits meet for repentance*. And what these were, the *Baptist* himself

† Matt. xxi. 28, 30.

|| Matt. iii. 8—10.

explains, when he adds: *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.* So that the *fruits meet for repentance*, are those good fruits which become the children of God, even the fruits of a steady, chearful, and constant obedience. And in our blessed Lord's message to the church of *Ephesus*, he exhorts them: *Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works*; hereby plainly declaring, that the relinquishing our faults, and returning to the practice of our proper duty, are both necessary to constitute a compleat and acceptable repentance: And indeed all pretences to repentance without this are insincere and hypocritical. What proof can there be, that the sense and judgment of the mind, in reference to sin or duty, is in the least changed, if there be no answerable alteration in the practice; if there be the same delight and frequency in sinning as before, and the same aversion to and habitual neglect of commanded duty? If indeed men pass the true judgment on these things, and yet by their actions contradict their own convictions, it is an aggravation of their fault, and shews the utter perversion of their will, and that notwithstanding their professions of sorrow for sin, and the acknowledgments of their own folly, that they may sometimes make, yet that they have never been sorry after *that godly manner which is unto life*. The return of the penitent sinner unto God implies, the return of the alienated heart to him, by the exercise of all
suitable

suitable and proper affections, terminating on him as their proper object, and excited by the consideration of the perfections of his nature, and the characters he stands in towards us; and in consequence of this, their returning to their obedience and duty, *approving his good and acceptable and perfect will, and offering themselves an holy, living sacrifice to him, which is their reasonable service; to glorify him with their bodies and souls, which are his.* How can a rebellious subject return to his prince, but by returning to his allegiance, and obeying the laws of his kingdom? Will he not always deserve the character of a rebel, and be liable to the punishment of one, whilst he maintains his opposition, and continues his hostility to his person and government? And what other construction can be put upon mens continuing to violate the laws of God, and living in a perpetual neglect of and opposition to his commands, but that they are in a state of real opposition to him, and will not return to their subjection and fidelity? The real penitent's, the genuine convert's language is: *The time past of my life is sufficient that I have served divers lusts and pleasures. Hence forward I yield myself to God, to become his servant, to have my fruit unto holiness, that the end may be life everlasting.*

And when there is this thorough alteration in the state of the mind, in the motives that influence him, the approbations and averasions he cherished, and in the judgment he passes on himself and actions; when he hath a becoming

grief for the evil and errors of his past conduct, is ashamed of himself and his bad behaviour, abhors himself as degenerated, corrupted and guilty, cherishes a just resentment and indignation against his own presumption, folly, and ingratitude, stands in awe of God's displeasure, and is afraid of his anger, earnestly desires reconciliation to God and acceptance with him, and vows revenge and destruction upon all the corrupt passions, affections, and habits of his nature: And when in consequence of this, he forsakes his former vices, and turns from all the transgressions he hath committed; when he returns with his whole heart to God, by sincerely embracing the truths of his word, by fervently praying for mercy and forgiveness, by glorifying God by an ingenuous acknowledgment of his sin, and unworthiness upon account of it, and by a willing, chearful, universal, constant obedience; this is the most satisfying evidence that his repentance is sincere and compleat, and in St. Paul's emphatical language, such a repentance *as needs not to be repented of. For godly sorrow worketh repentance not to be repented of**. A partial, ineffectual repentance, that leaves the mind unchanged, and the life unreformed; that implies no cure of their bad habits, nor any amendment of their sinful practices; that consists only in such a sorrow as doth not cure the hardness of the heart, nor mortify the bad affections of it; or in such confessions

* 2 Cor. vii. 10.

of sin as do not prevent the commission of it; or in such resolutions against it, as are broken as soon or as often as they are made, on the return of the next temptation, and the offer of the next favourable opportunity. Such a repentance cannot in the least profit us, because 'tis so imperfect, and evidences such manifest insincerity, and is therefore so offensive to God, as that it needs itself to be repented of, and should fill us, when we come seriously to reflect on it, with shame and confusion of face. But the repentance that I have described from the sacred writings, is absolutely compleat in all its parts, and contains in it all that repentance can imply, as arguing conscience, sense of honour, and ingenuity of disposition, or as implying the duty of a rational being, or as a prescribed remedy of reason and revelation, to prevent the destructive consequences of sin, and restore men to the forfeited favour and acceptance of their God. A better repentance than this there cannot be, and therefore it can never need to be repented of; because through the grace of God in Christ it shall be effectual to the salvation of all that *need it*, and are found in the due sincere exercise of it. And this leads me to the second general,

II. Which is to consider, *who are the persons* to whom the scripture call of repentance is directed; which our blessed Saviour expressly informs us in the words of my text: *I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. As the whole have no need of a*

physician, so the righteous have no need of repentance: 'Tis the sick and distempered that need the skilful physician's assistance, and sinners that want the sacred prescription of repentance to heal and restore them.

1. Our blessed Lord declares: *I am not come to call the righteous to repentance*; and from the account I have given you from scripture, it appears they have *no need of it*, and indeed *cannot practise it*, as it implies an entire alteration in the state of their minds, and conduct of their lives; because both these are in the main already what they should be, and so want no *thorough and general change* or alteration. One of the ancient commentators here remarks †: “That when our Lord saith, *I came not to call the righteous to repentance*, he speaks *ironically*, meaning: I came not to call you to repentance, who are self-righteous, and justify yourselves; whereas in truth there is none righteous, but all are sinners, and Christ calls them, not that they should continue in, but repent of sin.” But this observation doth not seem well grounded, since if they did falsely justify themselves, they had the more need of repentance; and were in fact frequently called and exhorted to it by Christ. Our Lord doth not here seem to meddle with the character of the *Pharisees*, nor to allow or deny them that sanctity to which they pretended; but only to vindicate himself and his own conduct in

† Theophyl. in loc.

conversing with sinners; because as one principal part of his office was to preach the necessity of repentance, it therefore became him to converse with sinners, not as a thing eligible in itself, but to call and bring them to repentance; just as a physician visits the sick, not as a matter of choice, and preferring converse with them before the conversation of the sound and healthy, but to minister to their cure and restore them to their health. When therefore our blessed Lord declares that he came not to call the righteous to repentance, undoubtedly

1. If there were any persons in the world, who were *perfectly righteous*, and without sin, the meaning would be, that *he was not sent to call them to repentance*. For if they were without sin, what could they repent of? If they were perfectly righteous, what need had they of any change, or how could they alter for the better? *The holy angels of God, who never left their first station*, nor fell from their integrity, have no need to recover and reconcile themselves to God by repentance. Nor had our first parents in paradise, whilst they continued in a state of *innocence*, and retained that original perfection in which their Maker created them. Repentance is no *primary* original duty of human nature, arising out of their frame, and necessarily connected with the gift of being. But it's a *secondary* and accidental duty, arising not from the first laws of nature, but the *violation* of those laws, and became necessary in consequence of the entrance of sin,

and the forfeiture of the divine favour. But 'tis what innocence can never want, and what in such a state God will never require, and what he would never have sent his Son into the world to call men to, had they not all been sinners against him, had they not forfeited his favour, and stood in need of this method to restore them to it. But though such righteous persons could never have needed repentance, yet as there are no such righteous persons in our world, our Saviour doth not seem to intend these in the words of my text. But then,

2. The scriptures speak of *righteous* persons in a *less perfect sense*; such who though they are not absolutely free from all sin, yet are really possessed of the inward dispositions of holiness, and govern their lives by the principles of a divine faith, and make it their constant study and care to approve themselves to God, by a steady and uniform practice of the duties they owe to God and man, and who therefore, as St. John expresses it, *are righteous because they do righteousness**; righteous in the main of their character, and in the estimation and gracious acceptance of God. Such as Job is described to be, who was *perfect and upright, that feared God and eschewed evil*†; or as Zecharias and Elizabeth, who were both *righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*‡; i. e. so blameless as to be guilty of

* 1 John iii. 7.

† Job i. 1.

‡ Luke i. 6.

no wilful and habitual neglects of their duty, or to act contrary to it in any known or gross instance whatsoever; and such as our blessed Lord describes in *Nathaniel*, who was *an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile* ||. Now though persons of this excellent character, and even the very best of men, are not absolutely perfect and righteous without sin, but have their failings, and are conscious to their errors, and so on this account have *need of repentance*, as that implies *walking humbly before God*, maintaining a *broken and contrite spirit*, and the acknowledgment of their great unworthiness in the divine presence; yet as *repentance* implies the *total change* in the heart and life, the alteration of the whole moral temper and character, 'tis evident that persons of this character, *who fear God and work righteousness, and walk uprightly before him*, have *not need* to be renewed by repentance, *i. e.* to undergo that universal conversion and thorough amendment of themselves, which is always signified by the term repentance in scripture; and that for this plain reason, because they *are already* become what repentance is intended to make them, and are changed in that very manner as they would be, were they actually to repent. And therefore Christ did not come to call such as these to *the same kind of repentance*, as he did others, but to encourage them to improve, and to carry on that blessed change

|| John i. 47.

which

which is begun in them towards perfection; to assure them of his Father's forgiveness and mercy, and that as renewed and changed they shall *obtain an inheritance amongst them that are sanctified by faith in him*. His doctrine and mediation is equally necessary to them and others, and though they are by the grace of God in that disposition and state, into which repentance is designed to introduce men; yet as in their best estate they are here greatly imperfect and chargeable with numerous defects, they can have no just foundation for the hope of *final absolution, and eternal salvation*, but through his merits and intercession, *who alone is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him*. And we may add on this head, that all who, under the Christian dispensation, are thus formed into, and made partakers of God's holiness, and thus moulded into the righteous disposition and character, whether it be by a gradual progress from the *first beginning* of life, or by virtue of the exercise of a sincere repentance; owe this their happy condition to the powerful efficacy of his word, and the concurring influences of his Spirit; and so are what they are *by his grace*, and have therefore reason to acknowledge it to the glory of his care and goodness; and their having no need of being called to repentance, is because they have been effectually called by him to it, and formed by him into that *new man*, which *after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*. And therefore,

3. It appears that *Christ came properly to call sinners to repentance*; sinners, not in that general sense in which all men, even the best of men, are sinners, but as that term implies in the New Testament such as are *dead in trespasses and sins, such as have walked according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind*, who have been under the influence of that sensual disposition which is *enmity to God, and is not subject to his law, and indeed cannot be*, and have departed from God by wicked works. This is evident from this very conversation of Christ with the *Pharisees*, who reproached him with conversing and eating with *Publicans and sinners*; by which they meant men of immoral, profligate characters, who had lived regardless of the law of God, and were known to have violated the essential obligations of it. This appears farther from all those passages in which the exhortations to repentance are made in the Old and New Testament, which are constantly directed to persons of extremely bad characters, and chargeable with the grosser immoralities of a wicked life. In the Old Testament the *people of God, as corrupted by idolatry, and all the vices of the Gentile world*, are called on to repentance; and when God saw that the *Ninevites* repented, 'tis explained by their *turning from their evil way, and the violence and wickedness that was in their hands*. In the New Testament the exhortation is particularly made to the *Jews that had persecuted Christ*, to the *Gentiles who were alienated from God by their*
wicked

wicked works of idolatry and vice, to disobedient children *, to those who make rash purposes, to those who oppose the truth † of the gospel doctrine, to those who corrupt and pervert it ‡, by doctrines tending to all impurity and vice, to lukewarm and indifferent Christians, who have only a name to live, the form of godliness without the power ||, to such as are degenerate, have left their first love §, and are fallen from their former zeal in piety and Christian virtue, and entered into all the liberties of the sinful age and generation in which they live. In a word, to such as appear to be destitute of all the inward habits and dispositions of real piety and virtue, or to have them greatly oppressed by the stronger power of sensual affections and vicious habits, and in consequence of this, to have lived in the allowed practice of those sins, that necessarily and constantly expose those who commit them to the righteous displeasure of God. And these are persons who need repentance, that entire change of mind and life, which is implied in the scripture notion of it, whose ruin is unavoidable without it, and who are incapable of salvation, unless God create in them a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within them; unless they wash them, make them clean, put away the evil of their doing from before the eyes of the Lord, cease to do evil and learn to do well; unless they are sanctified wholly, in their spirit, soul and body, and new created in Christ unto all

* Matt. xxi. 29. † 2 Tim. ii. 25. ‡ Rev. ii. 16.
 || Rev. iii. 19. § Rev. ii. 4, 5.

good works. And from what hath been said on this subject we may infer,

1. How *unreasonable the cavil* of the *Jews*, and particularly of the *Pharisees*, against our blessed Lord, for his conversing, eating and drinking with sinners was; since he conversed with them, not to *encourage them in sin* by his doctrine and example, but to *recover and save* them from it. If these proud and opinionated *Pharisees* thought themselves too good to need any repentance, and on this account rejected his exhortations to it, and refused familiarity and friendship with him because he pressed it on them, and threatened them with the divine anger without it, and thus turned away from the physician that would and could have healed them, was it therefore unreasonable he should shew his compassion to others, who were willing to receive and submit to his advice; or could he be polluted by visiting them, whom he attended to restore to health and soundness of mind by the salutary instructions he gave them, and doctrines of righteousness he taught them. His very mission from heaven was peculiarly *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, *to seek and to save them*, to save them by repentance and conversion to God; and therefore his associating with sinners was as necessary to answer this important end, as the attendance of the *physician* on the *sick*, to know their malady, and prescribe the proper remedies for their recovery. But

2. What hath been said on this subject shews the *benevolent intention* of our blessed Lord's coming

coming into the world; it was to *encourage and strengthen the righteous* in all their best dispositions and courses, and to *reclaim sinners* from those paths that lead to, and if not timely retreated from, must end in their eternal destruction. The *Jews* had formed to themselves quite different notions concerning the appearance of the *Messiah*; notions suited to their corrupt prejudices, affections, views and hopes; notions of temporal dominion and grandeur, of their possessing in the greatest abundance all the various means of gratifying their ambition, pride and avarice. But God was pleased to reserve for mankind a *nobler kind of blessing* in the person and kingdom of the *Messiah*; a blessing not to a particular people, but to *all* the nations of the earth; a blessing not relative only to the *present world*, out of which all must die, but to that *eternal state*, in which our lot is to be immutably fixed. God, when he promised him to mankind, promised him as a *Saviour from sin*, that one great, comprehensive, substantial evil of human nature, which is the only thing that can possibly hurt us, and prevent our attaining the true happiness of our beings. God sent him peculiarly to sinners, because they needed him. He sent him *to call them to repentance*, because this was a remedy absolutely necessary to recover them from the ruin of it. He sent him as the physician of the souls of men, to heal their disorders, to prevent their growing incurable, and bringing on eternal death. Oh how benevolent,

volent, how godlike the design! How worthy of infinite goodness is a Saviour sent on this gracious errand! To be delivered from criminal affections, from sinful passions, from the slavery of sin, and those evil practices that offend God, and injure our souls; and to be restored to health and liberty and peace of mind, to be reconciled to God by holy affections and permanent habits of virtue, to be rendered superior to the temptation of life, and rescued from the foul corruptions of it; to be disposed for the exercise of every grace, and enabled to practise every divine and humane virtue; to be brought back from our wanderings from God, and recovered to his image and likeness; to submit to him as our Lord, to delight in him as our happiness, to serve him as our Master, to honour him as our Lord, to be accepted of him, and to our happiness in him as our *portion and exceeding great reward*: This is salvation in the noblest sense of the word, this is happiness in its fullest extent, this is mercy surpassing every thing else that can be called so, and grace that shall be adored, admired and celebrated throughout the longest age of eternity. *Shew me this mercy, O God, and I have the full complement of my wishes!* Be thou, O Son of God, a Saviour to me in this respect, and I shall fear no other kind of evil, nor desire a more substantial and permanent redemption!

3. This account of repentance may help us to form a right judgment of ourselves, and to pass

pass the proper sentence upon our state and condition. Persons who have been guilty of wilful and presumptuous sins, whose former lives have been a continual opposition to the designs of God's grace, and spent in an habitual violation of his holy laws, have need of that repentance which consists in an entire alteration of the state of their minds, and the amendment of their whole conversation and practice. And this change can scarce ever be effected without that sorrow and grief, that inward shame and confusion, that self-abhorrence, that resentment and indignation against themselves, those strong fears and terrors, those eager desires of conversion and reformation, that revenge upon their sinful passions and habits, and those struggles and conflicts within their own breasts, which naturally result from the conviction of sin, and that view of the destructive consequences of it which arise from such a conviction. But the case of others is very different. They have been preserved from these enormities, they have been trained up by the good providence of God, and the blessing of a religious education, to piety and virtue, and have never in any remarkable instances deviated from the sacred path of religion, nor transgressed, by presumptuous sins, the commands of God, and have thus grown up to the temper and behaviour of true religion, and therefore cannot perceive any absolute and entire alteration of principles, sentiments, convictions, dispositions and actions, and

and have never felt those strong terrors, those awful fears, that self-abhorrence and the like distressing passions, that are necessary ingredients in the repentance of others. But let them not from hence suspect the safety of their state, or their interest in the mercy and salvation of God. Rather let them be thankful for the *preventing grace* that hath been vouchsafed them, and rejoice that God hath saved them from those corruptions of vice, by which others have endangered their eternal salvation. If they have not wounded their consciences by presumptuous sins, 'tis impossible they should feel that smart and pain that attends the healing of those wounds, or need that severity of cure, that is necessary in the case of others. If they are, what the bitterness of repentance should make them, all is well, and they need not seek or be in pain for more. And if they cannot date the *time*, or fix the period when their conversion to God *began*, they should rejoice that their conversion to God is *real*, and that they are, without the terrors of an awakened conscience, what those terrors are intended to produce. If their humility for the observed errors of their lives be real, and their endeavours to persevere in the Christian temper and life be habitual, and their governing desire is to be finally accepted of God; they have no reason to suspect the safety of their condition, but should acknowledge it as a singular blessing of God, that they have been preserved from the

450 *Characters of True Repentance, &c.* Sermon. 20.
snare of a wicked life, and go on their way
rejoicing, fully assured *that he who hath begun*
the good work within them, *will continue to*
perfect it till the day of Christ; always remem-
bering, that the very hope of the assistance
and guidance of God, is the great motive that
should make them *watchful* over themselves,
and excite them to *all diligence to make their*
calling and election sure.



S E R-

S E R M O N XXI.

The Importance of Gospel Repentance.

ACTS xi. 18.

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then bath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

CORNELIUS, a Roman Centurion, was a convert from Paganism to the knowledge and worship of the true God. *About the ninth hour of the day, i. e. three of the clock in the afternoon, one of the stated hours of prayer, and the time of the evening sacrifice, he had a clear vision of an Angel from heaven, assuring him that his prayers and alms were accepted of God, and commanding him to send to Joppa for Simon Peter, that he might receive instruction from him, what God had ordered him farther to do. In obedience to his vision he immediately sends for Peter, who having been prepared before hand by a vision that he also had received, went with the messengers Cornelius had sent to him. Peter preaches the gospel*

G g 2 to

to him, and declares that *whosoever believes in him should receive the remission of sins.* And whilst he was speaking these words, the Holy Ghost, in his extraordinary gifts, fell on Cornelius and all them that were with him, though they had none of them received circumcision, nor submitted to the ceremonial part of the law of Moses. And by thus receiving the Holy Ghost, they were declared *justified* and *accepted* of God *by faith only*, without any regard to the works of the law. On this the Apostle commanded them immediately to be baptized in the name of Christ, and to be received and acknowledged as the genuine members of his church and kingdom. Soon after this Peter goes to Jerusalem, where his conduct in this affair was censured by the Jewish Christians, who reproached him, that *he went into men uncircumcised, and did eat with them.* The Apostle in vindication of himself, before the Apostles and brethren in the city, related the whole matter from the beginning, giving them an account of his own vision, and of his being commanded by the Spirit to go with the messengers of Cornelius; of his preaching the gospel to them, and their immediately receiving the Spirit of God, in consequence of their faith in Christ. Upon this evident proof of God's accepting the Gentiles upon their believing, they all *beld their peace*, and instead of contending any farther with Peter for his conduct, *they glorified God*, and in the astonishment of their hearts, cried out in the words of my text:

Then

Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life; brought them to repentance by the preaching the gospel, and granted them the benefit of it, even life everlasting, immediately upon their faith in Christ, without circumcision, and conformity to the rites of the *Mosaic* law. It was this that created their astonishment, that God should admit the uncircumcised Gentiles to the benefit of repentance, and hereby declare that the works of the law were not at all necessary to justification and eternal life. *Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.* And as I have from a former subject shewn you the *nature of repentance*, as laid down in the sacred writings, I shall from these words endeavour to represent to you

I. The *importance and necessity* of it. And

II. The *practical improvement* of the doctrine.

I. I am to set before you the *importance and absolute necessity* of sinners *repentance*, in the *Christian* scheme; or of that change of mind and alteration of life which the scriptures have insisted on as an indispensable requisite to pardon and restoration to God's favour. And here the sacred writings furnish us with a great variety of considerations on this head.

I. When *John the Baptist* was sent as Christ's forerunner to prepare men for the reception of the Messiah, and the blessings of his kingdom, *this was the great subject on which he insisted, that sinners should repent*; for

when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them: O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance †. i. e. Repent of your sins, and shew the substantial fruits of it by reformation and amendment: And the subject of his preaching in the wilderness was: *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* ‡. And therefore he declared, that the baptism he administered was the *baptism of repentance* ||, to shew you that 'tis as necessary your minds should be washed clean from your former sins, as that your bodies should be washed and purified by water. And therefore St. Paul declared to the Christians at *Antioch in Pisidia*, that *John first preached before the coming of Christ the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel* §. The same he also declared to the disciples of *Ephesus*. And accordingly those who came to him to receive baptism from him, *were baptized, confessing their sins* *, which was one evidence that they exercised repentance for them. So that the importance and necessity of repentance appears from hence, that the *kingdom of God* was *opened* by the preaching of this doctrine, and 'twas by the profession and exercise of this, that sinners were prepared for and admitted into the privileges and benefits of it. In like manner

† Matt. iii. 7, 8. ‡ Matt. iii. 2. || Ver. 11. § Acts xiii. 24. * Acts xix. 4.

2. Our *blessed Saviour* himself began his *ministry* by the *same exhortation* to repentance. *Jesus began to preach and to say: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* †; hereby declaring, that the repentance of sinners was a necessary preparative to become his disciples, and to enjoy the benefits that were to take place under that dispensation and spiritual kingdom, that God by him intended to introduce into the world. And therefore he declares, that one principal intention of his coming into the world was, *to call sinners to repentance. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* ||. So that repentance is of that importance and necessity, as that the *great design* of our Lord's manifestation in the flesh, was to bring men to it, and his gospel may be truly considered in all the branches of it, as his affectionate and authoritative call to all men to the exercise of it. Hence, when he found that neither his doctrine nor miracles had any good effect upon the obstinate people to whom he was personally sent, he severely reproached them for their obstinacy and incorrigibleness. *He began to upbraid the cities, wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not* ‡; and speaking of *John the Baptist*, he tells the *Jews*: *John came to you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him. And ye when ye had seen it, repented not afterwards, that ye*

† Matt. iv. 17.

|| Matt. ix. 13.

‡ Matt. xi. 20.

might believe him*. And therefore to shew them their danger, and awaken them if possible to a sense of their duty and interest, he declares with the utmost solemnity, that without repentance their ruin was unavoidable. *I tell you: Except you repent ye shall all likewise perish* †; perish by as severe and remarkable a vengeance, as those *Galileans* did, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And as our blessed Saviour was thus a preacher of repentance himself, so he commissioned his Apostles to preach the same doctrine both to Jews and Gentiles. For but a little before his final removal from them, he said unto them: *Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to arise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem* ‡. And when St. Paul had his commission from Christ to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, 'twas in these terms; *to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God* §. i. e. As the Apostle himself understood it, *to bring them to repentance*. So that this was one great design of the Apostleship itself, and therefore must be a principal intention of the gospel ministry, to persuade sinners to be reconciled to God by repentance and reformation. This will appear farther if we consider,

* Matt. xxi. 32.
46, 47.

† Luke xiii. 5.
§ Acts xxvi. 20.

‡ Luke xxiv.

3. That in obedience to this commission, the *Apostles* made this *one constant subject* of their ministry, and preached it every where as an essential part of the doctrine and religion of Christ. Thus, during the life and ministry of Christ himself *they went out and preached that men should repent* *, because all men needed it, even the *Jews* themselves as well as the *Gentiles*. And St. *Peter* in the name of all the Apostles tells the *Jews*, in answer to their question: *Men and brethren, what shall we do? Repent*, saith he, *every one of you* †; and St. *Paul* tells king *Agrippa*: That in obedience to the heavenly vision, he *shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, and turn unto God, and do works meet for repentance* ‡. And to the Elders of the church of *Ephesus*, he declares: That the great subjects he insisted on, and testified both to *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were *repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ* ||. These were the doctrines which he knew to be *profitable* to all men, and that *counsel of God* which he had not shunned to declare to them. And because he was conscious to himself that he had acted with the utmost integrity in thus fulfilling his Apostleship, he could say with the utmost assurance: *Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men* §; plainly declaring,

* Mark vi. 12. † Acts ii. 37, 38. ‡ Acts xxvii. 19, 20.
 § Acts xx. 21. § Ver. 26.

that

that had he not preached *repentance* as well as *faith*, he had been unfaithful to his trust from God, and chargeable with the destruction of sinners themselves. And therefore repentance must be of the *greatest importance* in Christianity, as it was one principal part of the errand on which the Apostles were sent into the world, and a subject on which they continually insisted before *Jews* and *Gentiles*; to point out the *proper work and duty* of the *gospel ministry*, in all succeeding ages, and how those employed in it might finish it with joy, and the reviving testimony of a good conscience.

4. The *express command of God to repent*, shews the farther importance and *indispensible necessity* of it. Thus in the Old Testament: *Thus saith the Lord God, repent and turn yourselves from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations* *. To this command God adds the most affectionate persuasions and intreaties. *Repent and turn away yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away all your transgressions, whereby you have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit. For why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God. Wherefore turn yourselves and live* †. And in like manner in the New Testament. In the *Areopagus* at *Athens* St. Paul publicly declares, that though God

* Ezek. xiv. 6. † Ezek. xviii. 30—32.

winked at the times of past ignorance, yet now, viz. by the gospel revelation, *he commandeth all men every where to repent* *. And our blessed Lord in his message to the Angels of the churches of *Ephesus* and *Pergamos*, commands them to *repent, and remember from whence they are fallen, and do their first work* §. So that repentance is a duty enforced by the *supream authority of God*, and by the *express command of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and cannot be omitted and refused without the most aggravated guilt, and high disobedience to his sovereign will and pleasure. And the more ready and chearful submission is due to this command of God and our Redeemer, because 'tis a command resulting from the absolute *rectitude* of the *divine nature*, dictated by the most generous concern for the welfare and safety of sinners themselves, and the compliance with which saves them from the most entire and substantial destruction, and introduces them into the most valuable and durable privileges. Again farther,

5. The great *importance of repentance* appears, in that 'tis one *essential part of the very salvation of the gospel*, and what God hath *exalted our blessed Lord*, and constituted him Prince and Saviour for the very *end and purpose* of bestowing. Thus St. Peter in the name of the rest of the Apostles assured the High Priest and Jewish council, that *the Jesus whom they had slain, and hanged on a tree, God*

* Acts xvii. 30. § Rev. ii. 5—16.

had exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins *. The name ordered to be given him by an Angel from heaven, before his birth, was that of *Jesus*; or *The Saviour*, because *he was to save his people from their sins* †; and he was exalted to the right hand of power in heaven itself, that he might be invested more abundantly with all the prerogatives of a Saviour, and receive the full authority that was necessary to his conferring salvation upon the children of men. But what is his proper work as Prince and Saviour? What the *salvation* he is empowered to bestow? A *salvation from sin*, from all the ruinous consequences of it, affecting the moral character, or the state and condition of mankind. If we consider sin as the corruption of our natures, disaffecting us to and alienating us from God, enslaving us to bad affections and criminal pursuits, and a continual deviation from our proper duty, and highest happiness; Christ acts the part of a Saviour in this view by bringing us to repentance; which, as I have shewn you, implies the *change of the mind* in all its inward passions and affections, and a correspondent alteration in the whole of our future *behaviour and life*. And 'tis the great, the principal end of his advancement to this high dignity and power of Prince and Saviour, to carry on this repentance of sinners, and their

* Acts v. 30, 31.

† Matt. i. 21.

sincere return and reconciliation to God. To save us by repentance is an instance of God's noblest compassion and mercy to us. 'Tis a salvation of the utmost importance, and what lays the recovered penitent under the strongest obligations to Christ, who hath sought and saved him though lost, recovered him from his wandering, restored him to his reason and senses, rescued him from the most servile and destructive bondage, formed him into that disposition of mind, and reconciled him to that course of life, on which his own eternal peace and happiness, as well as his present honour and comfort have so necessary and absolute a dependence. So that true repentance is of the same importance with salvation itself. It is the first *beginning of eternal redemption*, and upon the gospel scheme, it is impossible that Christ can be a Saviour to us, so as to deliver us from the condemnation of sin by granting us the *forgiveness* of it, unless he first save us from the *corruption and power of it*, by a sincere and unfeigned repentance and conversion. And this

6. Shews the *indispensible necessity* and perpetual obligation of true repentance, in that the *remission of our sins*, and our *restoration to a state of peace and acceptance with God*, absolutely depends on, and can never be obtained without it. Men who have been desirous to preserve to themselves the liberty of sinning, and at the same time not to incur the punishment attending it; have made it their enquiry, as *Balak the Moabitish king* did:
Wherewith

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I give this or the other precious sacrifice for my transgression, and the sin of my soul? What commutation shall I make for my crimes, that I may go on with freedom and impunity? But all enquiries of this kind are absolutely fruitless, and there can be no other fair, candid, and honest answer given to them but this: That there is and can be no kind of sacrifice offered, that can secure the final remission of sins, but the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart, or such a repentance for sin, as shall not need to be repented of. Nothing can be more express than the gospel revelation in this article. Thus Peter to the Jews: Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, since the times of refreshment are come from the presence of the Lord, and since 'tis to you first God having raised up his Son Jesus, hath sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities †. And when our blessed Lord commissioned his disciples, and ordered, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, amongst all nations ||, it was commissioning them to declare to all mankind, that there could be no remission without repentance. Hence we find, that they are inseparably connected in the sacred writings, and that forgiveness is invariably represented as the effect and fruit of repentance, to cut up all foundation of the

† Acts iii. 19, 26.

|| Luke xxiv. 47.

hope of mercy for unreformed and impenitent offenders. And this

7. Is another consideration, that evinces the great *importance* and *necessity* of repentance in religion, viz. the *heinous evil*, and *fatal danger of impenitence* in sin, as represented by divine revelation. Thus 'tis described as an argument of the deepest corruption, stupidity and folly. *Why*, saith God by the prophet, *is this people of Jerusalem slidn back by a perpetual backsliding* †? i. e. To what can be imputed this constant and incurable degeneracy and wickedness? *They hold fast deceit*, they have no truth and sincerity in them. *They refuse to return*. *I bearkened and heard, but they spake not aright*. *No man repented him of his wickedness, saying: What have I done?* Every one turned to his course, every man pursued his own vices, *as the horse rushes into the battle*, with a brutal obstinacy and rashness. *Yea, the stork in the heaven knows her appointed times, and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming*. But *my people know not the judgment of the Lord*. They are more inconsiderate than the fowls of the air, because they consider not their own interest, nor take the proper measures to preserve themselves from the judgments of God. And thus in the *Revelations* of St. John ‡, 'tis spoken of as the highest aggravation of the sins of men, that the judgments of God could not bring them to repentance §, cure

† Jer. viii. 5—7. ‡ Rev. ix. 20, 21. § Rev. xvi. 9—11.

them

them of their idolatries and vices, nor turn them from their evil deeds. Hence our Lord severely threatens. *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish* *. And in his message to the church of *Ephesus*: *Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent* †. And to that of *Pergamos*: *Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth* ‡, i. e. take away all your Christian privileges, and give you up to destruction, in my just displeasure. Hence 'tis represented by our blessed Lord as what excludes men from all the benefits of the kingdom of God. *Verily I say unto you, that publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. They believed in John. But when you had seen, ye repented not, that ye might believe him* §. Nothing can secure you a share in the benefits of my kingdom. Even those whom you condemn as the very worst of persons; are more likely to obtain salvation than you. And this impenitency in sin is the most heinous, and exposes to a more aggravated condemnation, when persons continue in it, though they have space given them for repentance, and are powerfully led by the mercy and goodness of God to the exercise of it. Thus our Saviour declares of some pretended prophets in the church of *Thyatira*, described under the name of *Jezabel*, that I gave her

* Luke xiii. 5. † Rev. ii. 5. ‡ Ver. 16. § Matt. xxi. 32.

space to repent, and she repented not *, and therefore he threatens her with the most exemplary punishment, *unless she repented of her evil deeds.* And St. Paul tells the Romans, that such who are under the possession and influence of an *hard and impenitent heart, do treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God* †. It seals them up to a more complicated and heavy condemnation. Now what is there can give us a stronger conviction of the great importance and absolute necessity of repentance, than to see obstinacy and impenitency in sin thus characterised by God himself, represented in his word as the very worst disposition we can labour under, and as what exposes us to absolute and irremediable ruin. Can any one doubt after this, whether the *preaching of repentance* be *gospel preaching*, or whether it be not one great part of the work of the ministers of Christ to exhort and press men to it? If they are to be cautioned and warned against eternal ruin, and the aggravated destruction of the life to come, they must be persuaded and exhorted, and commanded by the authority of God, and in the name of Christ, to an immediate, serious, and universal repentance and return to God; because without this their salvation from wrath is impossible, and their restoration to his favour can never be effected. And therefore

* Rev. ii. 21, 22.

† Rom. ii. 5.

8. Whatever recommendations be given of faith, and whatever saving effects be ascribed to it in the sacred writings, yet it will appear that *repentance is equally necessary with faith*, and that *faith without repentance will never* be available to final salvation. The scriptures indeed represent this repentance as a *preparative* to faith in Christ, and as previously necessary to the believing his gospel. Thus our Lord himself when he began preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, said: *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye, and believe the gospel* *; and the author to the *Hebrews* represents the very first principles and *fundamental* doctrines of Christianity to be, *repentance from dead works*, and *faith towards God* †; and St. Paul testified to *Jews and Gentiles*, *repentance towards God*, and *faith in our Lord Jesus Christ* ‡; repentance *first*, as previously requisite to embrace the doctrines, the *peculiar* doctrines of Christianity. There are indeed some principles of faith necessary to bring men to repentance, and in particular the belief of the *principles of natural religion*, relating to the being, perfections, providence, and moral government of God; and on this account *faith* may be justly said to be the *foundation of repentance*, because there must be some principles of religion to produce it, as it implies a change from vice to godliness and virtue, which is the repentance of which

* Mark i. 14, 15.

† Heb. vi. 1.

‡ Acts xx. 21.

I am speaking. But yet the *foundation* of a *saving faith* may be very justly said to be laid in repentance in another view of things, as faith hath for its object *Christ* in his mediatorial character, and *as made of God to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.* For till there be a thorough conviction of the evil of sin, there will be little concern about the method of redemption established in Christ. Till the destructive consequences of it are clearly discerned, there will be but little sense of the necessity and worth of a Redeemer, little inclination to submit ourselves to his power and authority, to take refuge in his advocacy, and to embrace him as the only one by whom we can be saved. When the sense of sin runs high, when the conscience is awakened by the just fears of the fatal consequences of it, from the divine justice and anger, when the desires after deliverance from the power and guilt of it grow warm and prevalent, and there arises in the mind a growing hatred and abhorrence of it; in such a situation the provision of a Saviour appears highly worthy the compassion and mercy of God, an interest in him is then seen to be a privilege infinitely valuable, and that compassionate invitation, *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest*; oh! how gladly is it accepted; and how readily doth the convinced repenting sinner reply: *To whom Lord should we go but to thee, for thou hast the words of eternal life?* So that repentance is as

necessary as faith ; because faith itself, as that implies the coming to, the believing in, and receiving of Christ, as the *way, the truth, and the life*, as the atonement, intercessor, and advocate for sinners, in a great measure depends on the truth and sincerity of repentance.

Besides, whatsoever are the commendations, valuable effects, and benefits which the scriptures ascribe to faith, the very same, or such as are of equal importance, are ascribed to repentance also. Is *faith* commanded by God ? so is *repentance*. Is *faith* said to be the *gift of God* ? so is *repentance*. Are we said to be *sanctified* by the *one*, so we are said to be *washed* and *made clean* by the *other*. *Remission* of sins is equally ascribed to *both*. Doth our Lord say, that *whosoever believes in me shall not perish* †, so his inspired Apostle declares, that *the Lord is not willing that any should perish*, but *that all should come to repentance* *. Is eternal life connected with salvation ? *Godly sorrow also worketh repentance unto salvation* §. Is eternal life connected with *believing* ? When God also grants repentance, 'tis *repentance unto life*. In a word, faith is of no consequence to our final acceptance with God, unless it be the effect of repentance, attended with, or productive of it. They are both connected in the gospel scheme, both supported and enforced by the same sacred authority. Faith gives relief to the awakened and penitent sinner, and introduces the hope of pardon. And repentance is the

† John iii. 15.

* 2 Pet. iii. 9.

§ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

only sure evidence of the life and acceptableness of faith.

9. Hence 'tis no wonder farther that *repentance*, should be declared *universally necessary to all sinners*, without exception, that nothing can excuse them from it, and that all external privileges and advantages should be represented as absolutely ineffectual without it. The *Jews* were grown so exceedingly corrupt, and valued themselves so much upon their being the *natural posterity of Abraham*, as that they imagined this single circumstance of their being descended from him would secure them the divine favour, and be an effectual protection from every mark of his displeasure. This unreasonable partiality to themselves, and false opinion of the conduct of God, *John* the Baptist obviates in his discourse to them, when they came to be baptized by him. *Bring forth, saith he, fruits meet for repentance* §. *And think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father* † Don't imagine this will be of any advantage to you without repentance. For *I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham*. Rather than you shall inherit his promises, and the blessings contained in them, without repentance and amendment, without *Abraham's* faith and obedience, God will do, what he is able to do, convert these very stones into men, into a set of just and righteous and believing

§ Matt. iii. 8.

† Ver. 9.

men, that they may inherit as his spiritual seed, and the heirs of his faith, all the blessings promised to him and his spiritual seed. *For now also the ax is laid to the root of the trees †.* God's judgments hang over you, and threaten your entire extirpation, as the excision of the tree is near when the ax is laid to the root of it. *Therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire.* Even you, who boast yourselves *Abraham's* seed, and God's peculiar people, shall be utterly destroyed, if you are not careful to prevent it by a timely repentance and amendment. But besides their being *Abraham's* natural posterity, they had another ground of false security, and from which they promised themselves impunity in their vices, and that was their *circumcision, sacrifices for sin, and their punctual observance of the ceremonies of the Mosaic law.* This is what *St. Paul* calls the being *justified by the works of the law.* And to this the *Jews* trusted as an effectual security from the punishment of their sins, though they went on incorrigibly in the practice of them. But against this groundless presumption the Apostle declares, that *no flesh living could be justified by the works of the law**; but that if the *Jews* themselves did by *hardness and impenitency of heart, treasure up wrath for themselves against the day of wrath, God would render unto them indignation and wrath, tribu-*

† Matt. iii. 10.

* Rom. ii. 5.

lation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile †; and that all their boasted privileges should only serve to aggravate their condemnation and punishment. As all are sinners, *repentance* is the natural duty of all; and therefore 'tis prescribed and enjoined as a perpetual universal remedy, and as a necessary preservative from the wrath to come. Thus Christ orders that *repentance and remission of sins should be preached amongst all nations, beginning at Jerusalem* †. And St. Paul at Athens. God now commands all men every where to repent ‖. 'Tis universally the duty of all sinners as such, a duty founded in the eternal reason of things, and established by the unalterable constitution of God by Christ. So that for sinners to put any thing in the room of repentance, or to imagine that their external privileges will exempt them from the necessity of it, or that any zeal for opinions and ceremonies will excuse the want of it, or that by any kind of dependencies they can secure their remission without it, all these imaginations are but self-deceptions, and the hopes they flatter themselves with on these accounts, will finally issue in a severer and more bitter disappointment.

And thus have I set before you, the absolute necessity and great importance of repentance in the gospel scheme. It was preached

† Rom. ii. 8, 9. † Luke xxiv. 47. ‖ Acts xvii. 30.

by *John the Baptist* as Christ's forerunner, by *our blessed Saviour himself* in the first entrance on his ministry, and by his *Apostles*, according to the commission they received from him. It is expressly commanded by God, 'tis an essential part of the gospel salvation, 'tis previously necessary to the remission of sins, impenitency is sure to be attended with final destruction, 'tis of equal importance with faith itself, and is declared indispensibly necessary to all men in all ages, even to the end of time. I shall now conclude with some practical inferences. And,

I. The importance and necessity of repentance, as declared by the sacred writings, is an intrinsic argument of the *great excellency and truth of Christianity*; because 'tis placing it in that rank in which it ought to stand, and ascribing to it its proper dignity and value. For though mens partiality to their vices may set them upon inventing a thousand superstitions, and using a great variety of ceremonies, to purify themselves from sin, and to make some compensation and atonement for it, *i. e.* to save themselves from the punishment, without ever being reformed from the practice of it; yet there is no truth more demonstrably certain, no principle in religion more evident, than that there can be no final escaping the destructive consequences of sin, from the just displeasure of God offended by it, without repentance for what we have done amiss, and a real and prevailing care to act a wiser and better

better part for the future. This is a *natural preparative* for mercy and forgiveness, and indeed 'tis *all that we can do*. If there be any need of any thing further, if the honour of the divine government requires any *propitiation* and atonement for sin in order to the forgiveness of it, such propitiation must, in the nature of the thing, be of *God's providing*, it being impossible for men to offer any sacrifice to God, that shall be intrinsically a propitiation for their sins. Such a sacrifice God only can find out, and all that is left for us as sinners to do, is humbly to acknowledge our offences before God, to forsake them in obedience to his command, to return to our duty to him, and thankfully to acquiesce in that propitiation he hath appointed, as fully satisfactory, and abundantly sufficient. And if Christianity had set up any such external methods of satisfaction and atonement, as should in their nature tend to *vacate* the obligation, and set aside the necessity of repentance in sinners; it would need no other objection against the *truth* and *excellency* of it. This single one would effectually destroy every argument that could be produced in favour and vindication of it; since an institution calculated to render men easy and safe in an impenitent state of sin, and alienation from God, from whatsoever author it be derived, cannot possibly have its original from him, who is *holy* in his nature, and of *purser eyes than to behold iniquity* with approbation and pleasure. But in this Christianity is
free

free from every kind of objection. It hath wholly delivered sinners from all care and anxiety about the making any atonement for their sins. Every thing of this kind that was convenient and proper, God hath, through his great mercy, prepared ready to their hands; and the only thing he requires of us, which indeed is all we can do to any good purpose, is to *forsake our sins* by a thorough repentance, and to return to God with all our hearts, and with a sincere obedience to his commands for the future; *thankfully receiving* and fully depending on that *propitiation* for sin, that hath been made by his only Son, in obedience to his command, as making all the satisfaction that God required, and therefore all that was or could be necessary to his extending mercy and pardon to penitent and converted sinners.

2. Is *repentance* of that *necessity* and *importance* as hath been described, this shews the *great folly* and *infinite danger* of *delaying* and *deferring* it. And yet how difficultly are sinners persuaded to this necessary work? How many excuses will they invent to put off the one important necessary thing, upon which their eternal welfare and interest absolutely depend. Though they have frequent convictions of the evil of sin, and their consciences often suggest to them the danger of their condition, yet by how many artifices do they impose on themselves, to render their own hearts tolerably easy, though they are in a
state

state the most unhappy and hazardous, that can be in the present world. For what condition can be worse, or more to be dreaded than theirs, who are slaves to vice, who are enemies to God by wicked works, who live under the burthen of unpardoned guilt, who have no interest in the favour of God, no reasonable hope of salvation by Christ, but are heirs of wrath, and every day of their whole lives tending nearer and nearer to irrecoverable and eternal destruction; and who, notwithstanding all this dreadful ruin that is before them, and hourly hangs over their heads, are refusing the only remedy that can save them, and desperately deferring to make use of that method which can retrieve their circumstances, and place them in a condition of real safety and good hope? If repentance be necessary in the nature of the thing, and by the unalterable appointment of God, to escape the punishment of a future life, 'tis nothing less than madness to defer it. If he is reluctant and backward to it now, how can the sinner be sure that *reluctance* will not become *greater* and more unconquerable in a longer continuance in sinful practices? If it be an unpleasing *difficult* work, will not the *difficulty increase* as our sinful habits become stronger by indulgence, and more deeply rooted by being cherished and indulged? Or if we depend on *futurity*, how ill grounded and presumptuous is that dependence, since the constant experience of every man tells him,

him, nothing is so absolute an *uncertainty* as the *continuance of life*. And who that gives himself leave to make any one impartial reflection, or to consider the most obvious dictates of wisdom and prudence, would defer one moment to secure himself against all possibility of future ruin, or delay but for an hour so important a concern the reconciling himself to God, on which *all the happiness* of an *eternal existence* doth necessarily depend. Every consideration of duty and interest loudly call on the sinner immediately to return to God by the exercise of godly sorrow, and sincere repentance, and to lay hold of his offered mercy, whilst the patience and forbearance of God continue, and he hath lengthened out the opportunity and means for repentance and salvation. Especially if he finds any dispositions in his own mind to repentance, if he labours under any convictions of sin, hath any strong apprehensions of the misery of his condition, and prevailing desires to return and be reconciled to God. Such a sense and conviction of things should be carefully cherished and preserved, as they argue the strivings of conscience, and the influences of the Spirit of God, both tending to the same happy end, to reform and recover the sinner, and bring him into a state of reconciliation to and consequent acceptance with God. And if we neglect, or suppress these inward sentiments and motions in our breasts, we act a very criminal and unnatural part, may probably

bably never more recover them, and endanger our being permitted to go on thoughtless and impenitent, till we are ripe for and sealed up to destruction.

3. *God's calling us to repentance*, and giving us the *liberty*, the *grace*, and *benefit of it*, should be esteemed, what it really is, *an high instance of the sovereign grace of God*, the most demonstrative proof of his compassionate regard to us, and tender concern for our happiness. The words of my text, *Then hath God granted unto the Gentiles repentance unto life*, are an exclamation dictated by wonder and amazement, that God should allow the benefit of repentance to them, or accept their repentance through Christ, so as to render it available to pardon and eternal life. And indeed God's thus *granting us repentance* is an *invaluable privilege and favour*, and a most substantial mark of his desire to prevent our eternal destruction. This seems to be all that is left for God to do, consistent with his character, as the all-wise and righteous governor of the world. It is the last effort of mercy to recover sinners to their duty and happiness, to call them to repentance, and assure them that it shall be acceptable to eternal life. And as this is the last effort of mercy on God's part, so 'tis the last possibility, the only chance that is left us for salvation and eternal life. If we condemn God's call to repentance, and will not hear and obey it, *we forsake our own mercies, and put the salvation of*
God

God far from us for ever. Instead therefore of cherishing any inward reluctance to this duty, of looking upon repentance as an hard and unreasonable command, and of deferring to comply with it, let us esteem it as a most substantial privilege, and readily comply with it as a necessary measure, and as the final result of the divine patience and mercy, to rescue us from guilt and condemnation, and restore us to the forfeited privileges of his favour; and whilst the space for repentance continues, and the golden scepter of peace is held out to us, approach it with becoming humility, and real contrition of heart, and with the sincerest resolutions of future obedience thankfully touch it, that our souls may live and not die.

4. If repentance be of that importance as hath been represented, so as that eternal life and salvation are connected with it; it well becomes us to *consider what our own state is*, and whether it be such as repentance implies. Repentance doth *not* consist *only in sorrow* for our offences, that is ineffectual to reform us; not in *good resolutions and promises*, that are never kept, but broken by the next temptations that occur to us; not in a *partial reformation*, and forsaking certain sins, that interest or convenience, or health may incline us to part with, and that there is but little difficulty to break the habit of, or as to which the strength of passion and inclination may fail us; not in *temporary restraints*

straints and abstinences from sin, whilst the habit remains uncured, and the disposition to it strong and prevalent as ever. No, repentance implies much more than this; the *real universal change of the heart*; the mortification of all bad affections, the destruction of all criminal habits, the right direction of all the inward affections, and, in a word, in the turn of the heart in all its noblest powers and best dispositions to God; and that consequent separation from all sinful practices, and that delight in and power to do the things that please God, which are the only substantial evidences that the conversion of the heart is genuine and universal. He who is conscious to this, may assure himself that he is, what a real penitent always will be, and need not look for any farther and better evidences that his repentance is unto life. And what reason hath he when reviewing his own state,

5. To be *thankful to God* for that happy alteration that is produced in him, whereby he is *made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*. If you can say, that God hath by his good providence preserved you from the corruptions of the world, and trained you up from the first beginnings of life, into the care of religion, the love and practice of virtue, and a due concern for your salvation, you have reason to rejoice that you have thus far no need of that bitter repentance, which the circumstances of others call for. But if you had burst through the fence of a religious education,

education, and gone far in the paths of sin and destruction, and God hath reclaimed you and granted you repentance unto life, with what a warmth of gratitude should you own his *forfeited grace*, and becoming the chearful and faithful servants of God, by *having your fruit unto holiness* secure as your *end everlasting life*.



S E R M O N XXII.

The Gospel Motives to Repentance.

ACTS xvii. 30, 31.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained.

I Have shewn you from other passages of scripture, wherein the *nature* of *Gospel repentance* consists, and what the *importance* of it is in the Christian scheme. But I should leave this subject extreamly imperfect, did I not set before you what *assistance* the gospel revelation offers, to encourage men, and tender their endeavours to repent finally successful; or what are the *peculiar motives* with which it enforces the doctrine of repentance. For when once men have contracted fixed habits of vice, and a facility and strong disposition for sinning; have tasted of the

pleasures of it, and are carried away by powerful inclinations, and numerous examples to indulge themselves in all the gratifications of it; their recovery by repentance is no easy matter; nor is it to be expected that the best exhortations to it will ever prove effectual, unless such motives be presented to their view, as are sufficient to overbalance the power, and break the force of all the various temptations and inducements, by which they are led to continue in the practice of it. And this is one consideration, that renders the *gospel revelation* so exceeding valuable, that it offers to our thoughts all the motives which can be suggested to the mind, are of any importance in themselves, and adapted to awaken their fears and excite their hopes, and so to work in them that godly sorrow and repentance for sin, *that shall never need to be repented of*. And this will abundantly appear from the following considerations.

I. If the most *affecting representations* of the *evil of sin* in its nature, and *dreadful consequences*, carry in them any power to awaken men, to bring them to reflection, and reclaim them from their vices, the sacred writings are peculiarly adapted to promote this great and important design. St. Paul, in describing the destructive consequences of sin, tells us, *that sin*, exposed and *subjected him to death*, that *it might appear sin* *; appear in its proper colours, to be the most mischievous and deadly

* Rom. vii. 13.

evil; and that by perverting the intention of the law, which was good, and ordained to life, so perverting it as to render him liable to death, it *might become exceeding sinful*; be acknowledged to be the one grand comprehensive evil of human nature. Because he could not find a stronger term to describe the evil of sin, than one derived from itself; he represents it by its being exceeding sinful; a most complicated, mischievous, ruinous evil. He calls it a *fruitless*, or unprofitable and *shameful* evil*; that *enslaves* and brings men into bondage†; having *death* as its certain *wages*‡; as exposing men to the righteous judgment of God§; as *enmity to him*, and incapable in its nature of ever being subject to his law||; as absolutely *preventing* men from ever *entering into the kingdom of God***, and exposing men to the punishment of an *everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe*††. In truth, one grand and governing design of the whole of revelation is, to set forth the dreadful consequences of sin, and to possess men's minds in the most effectual manner with the hatred and abhorrence of it. Hence 'tis represented as the cause of the *loss of paradise*, the *introduction of death* into the world, the *destruction* of all mankind by a general *flood*, of all the *judgments* that have befallen *nations* and particular *persons*, of the

* Rom vi. 21. † Ver. 16. ‡ Ver. 23. § Rom. ii. 1.
| Rom. viii. 7. ** Gal. v. 21. †† 2 Thess. i. 9, 10.

punishments of a future life, and that rendered the incarnation and sufferings and death of the Son of God, a necessary means in the divine counsels, to redeem men from the destruction it brought on them, and to recover them to the happiness they had forfeited by it. And there are no writings, that give so just, so clear and perfect an account of the evil of it, as the sacred records, and which therefore offer so powerful and effectual a motive to turn from it, by a sincere and universal repentance. And therefore

II. In consequence of these representations of the evil of sin, it expressly declares that *repentance is commanded by God*, and universally enjoined by the immediate and express authority of God. Thus in my text: *The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent.* The words should have been rendered: *God despising, or abhorring the times of ignorance, viz. of idolatry and vice, now commands all men every where to repent.* So that the natural dictates of reason and conscience, that suggest the necessity of repentance, are enforced by divine precept, which now makes it the indispensable duty of all men without exception, and renders them wholly inexcusable, if they neglect or refuse to do it. And as God thus commands it, so farther

III. The *goodness of God* powerfully leads to it. *Despiseſt thou the riches of his goodness, not knowing that the goodness of God leads thee to repentance?*

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pentance †? The design of God's goodness to men, in all the various instances of it, is to engage them by motives of love, by principles of gratitude, and their hopes of farther favours from him, to manifest their concern for their past sins, to forsake them in obedience to his command, and to make him all those returns of duty which he expects and demands from them. 'Tis impossible that the design of the goodness of God can be to encourage them to continue in sin which he abhors, to affront his authority, and violate and trample on the laws of his government. For this would be for God to contradict himself, and to defeat the intentions of his own providence. The design of goodness shewn is to conciliate esteem, affection, and love, to overcome opposition, enmity and hatred, to cure men of their enmity to himself, to recover them from their obstinate persisting in what displeases him, and to engage them to a willing submission to his supream authority for the future. And in how many instances doth this goodness of God to sinners appear.

1. How great is the *patience* and *forbearance* that God exercises towards them, in *continuing their lives*, lengthening out their opportunities for mercy, and granting them space to repent and return to God. This is the kind language of God's forbearing to destroy them: *Wash ye, make ye clean, put away your trans-*

† Rom. ii. 4.

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gressions, why will ye die? His patience hath
this principal intention, your recovery from
sin, and reconciliation to himself. *The Lord*
is long suffering toward us, willing that all should
come to repentance, saith the Apostle Peter. He
waits that he may be gracious §, even to those
whom he could easily, and might justly de-
stroy. It from hence follows :

2. *That God takes no pleasure in the death and*
destruction of sinners, and that their ruin is en-
tirely of themselves. Natural light and rea-
son, if it speaks any thing clearly, loudly
declares this; that the original view and pri-
mary intention of creation, and bringing ra-
tional beings, capable of happiness, into life,
could not be their eternal destruction and mi-
sery, and that this their ruin cannot be in it-
self any satisfaction to the mind of God.
He doth indeed take pleasure in the whole
of his conduct, as governed by wisdom and
absolute rectitude of nature; and if sinners
by an obstinate impenitency in sin will pre-
pare themselves for ruin, and render it un-
worthy the divine character and perfections to
restore them to mercy, and accept them to
his favour, their destruction is unavoidable,
and God cannot but approve his own conduct
in the punishments he inflicts on them. In
this sense God *delights* in the exercise of judg-
ment and righteousness, as well as *loving kind-*
ness. But then the thing in which God
delights, is not in the misery of those he

§ 2 Pet. iii. 9.

punishes

punishes formally and simply, considered in itself, and irrespectively to the reasons and causes of it; but in the *equity* and *justice* of his own procedure, as he acts agreeably to the nature of things, and the characters of men. For nothing is more evident than *that he doth not willingly afflict and grieve the children of men. I have no pleasure, saith God, in the death of him that dies* *; and that we might entertain no doubt in this important article, he hath confirmed it by an oath: *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked* †; agreeable to that of the Apostle: *He is not willing, or desirous that any should perish* ‡. And therefore we may farther most certainly infer, another instance of that goodness of God which should lead us to repentance: *viz.*

3. That the *repentance* of a sinner is *highly pleasing and acceptable* to God, what he patiently waits for, and delights in. *He is willing that all should come to repentance* §, suitable to what he declares by the inspired prophet: *As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked*, and as the next words should be supplied: *I have pleasure that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel* ||? Plainly hereby declaring, that their destruction was owing to their own wilful obstinacy; that they forced him to measures of severity, and that he

* Ezek. xviii. 32. † Ezek. xxxiii. 11. ‡ 2 Pet. iii. 9.
§ Ibid. || Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

would have rejoiced at their repentance, and taken pleasure in the exercise of mercy towards them. The sins, and vices and follies of men, cannot, in their nature, give him any satisfaction, who hates sin with a perfect hatred, who is the *righteous Lord that loveth righteousness*, who approves moral rectitude in whomsoever he beholds it; who approves the first tendencies and dispositions in the hearts of sinners to retrieve their past conduct, to forsake their evil practices, and apply themselves to the performance of their duty, the preventing their ruin, and the securing their happiness. And when they are prevailed with by the consideration of his goodness, the sense of their obligations, and the right discernment of their own interest, to acknowledge their past sins, to mortify their evil habits, to abstain from their criminal pursuits, *to become the servants of righteousness*, and *to have their fruits unto holiness*, 'tis the most grateful and acceptable offering they can present to the Father of mercies; not only because in thus doing they act a wise and rational part, but because they become hereby capable objects of his mercy, and render it consistent with his moral perfections and character, and the great ends of his administration, to confer upon them the most substantial and durable blessings.

4. The very *constituting repentance* one of the essential *terms of mercy and salvation*, and fixing it as the gracious condition of sinners acceptance with himself; the allowing them the

the benefit of it, and solemnly declaring by Christ, that it shall be universally available with faith to pardon and eternal life, is itself the most substantial evidence of the grace and mercy of God, and demonstrates beyond all reasonable exception, and possibility of doubt, of what high account repentance and conversion are in the judgment and esteem of God, how much he delights in it, and how acceptable to him the sinner is in the exercise of it; and that this is what he chuses preferable to the condemnation and eternal destruction of men; a measure of severity to which he will never proceed, but when they render their own salvation by his mercy impossible.

And how strong are the inducements, that arise from instances of the divine goodness, and how powerfully do they lead us to consider and amend our ways, *to awake to righteousness and sin not*, and to become effectually *reconciled unto God*. Shall we suffer his patience and forbearance to be wholly lost, to be absolutely thrown away, so as to receive no benefit from it; so as to have no other effect but the aggravation of our sin, and the enhancement of our future misery? If God takes no pleasure in our death, why should we *destroy ourselves*. If he had rather we should live, why should we *chuse death*, and willingly involve ourselves in destruction? If our repentance and conversion be so acceptable to that blessed being, what he daily waits for, and which whenever he discerns *he rejoiceth*

joiceth over, how willingly should we be found in the exercise of it, who alone are to receive the benefit of it, and when without it our ruin is irretrievable? If God's goodness be illustrious in allowing and admitting sinners to the privilege of it, 'tis the height of folly to exclude ourselves from such an advantage, and prevent our having any share in that constitution of mercy that God hath thus calculated for our salvation and happiness. But

5. *The mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ* is, in all the various parts of it, the most efficacious and powerful *motive* and means to bring the sinner to recollection and repentance, and to persuade him to return and become reconciled to God. The motives arising from the intrinsic evil of sin, and the consideration of the divine goodness, patience, and concern for our happiness, are of very great importance, in the representation in which *natural light* and reason will place them. But the *mediation of Christ* adds a *peculiar force* to these natural motives, and clothes them with a persuasive influence, that nothing else can give them; as it gives the most affecting view of the evil of sin, and establishes the goodness and mercy of God by such facts as are the most substantial and convincing evidences of it. Consider here,

1. This was one *principal end* of the *mission of Christ* into the world*. *I am come to call*

* Matt. ix. 13.

sinners

sinners to repentance. Had not sin been an evil extremely displeasing to God, and prejudicial to all the valuable interests of men, God would never have sent so extraordinary a person as his only begotten Son, to seek and to save sinners. Had not repentance on their part been necessary, and had not God been determined to accept of it, through Christ, he had never been employed by his heavenly Father to preach it, nor would ever have condescended to such a state of humiliation, to render him capable of preaching it. But his veiling that form of God, in which he had appeared, with a fleshly tabernacle, and becoming a preacher of repentance and righteousness, demonstrates God's high displeasure against sin, as well as determined purpose of mercy to the penitent recovered sinner.

2. And agreeable to this design of his coming into the world, when he entered into his ministry *he called sinners to it*, and conversed freely with them the more effectually to persuade them to it. All his doctrine was calculated to promote it, and to shew the folly and hazard of trusting to any securities for favour and acceptance with God without this. Impenitent sin, and all professions of godliness without forsaking it, are what he severely reproached and condemned; condemned universally, as delusion and hypocrisy.

3. And as the *miracles* he wrought were wrought in confirmation of this doctrine, that
he

he was sent to call sinners to repentance, those miracles ought to have awakened to it those to whom our Lord's personal ministry was peculiarly confined, and would have prevailed on any other people less profligate than they. *If the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes* *. And as those miraculous powers which he exerted were the fullest proof that his mission and doctrine were from God, they are to this day to be considered by us, as means by which God intends to awaken us to a sense of our danger by sin, to open in our minds the springs of an ingenuous godly sorrow on account of it, and to excite us to a due care to save ourselves from the guilt and condemnation that attends it.

4. And as he spent his life in preaching this doctrine, and others of a like nature connected with it, so what was *the reason of his death*? What are we to infer from those aggravated sufferings to which he submitted? What is his language on the cross to sinners? What was his being hung up as a propitiation and atonement to signify to us? What this? "I am paying your debt, and I will pay it to the uttermost. Sin on, and fear no consequences. I am your surety, and will save you from your danger." Dares any one ascribe this language to the dying Son of God? What says the word of God? What

* Matt. xi. 21.

doth that declare he died for? Why expressly, *that he suffered for sin* *. What to render us safe and harmless in the commission of it? No. *He gave himself for us, that he might so redeem us from all iniquity, as to purify us to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works* ||; or in the language of Christ himself, that he might effectually *call us to repentance*. So that they who have not been prevailed on, by the dying compassion of a Saviour, to renounce the dominion and practice of sin; know not what the *fellowship of his sufferings* means, and are not made duly conformable unto his death. *For as in that he died, he died unto sin once, likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord* †.

5. The exaltation and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is also calculated for the same end, as his sufferings and death, viz. the more effectually to promote this grand design of our repentance and recovery to God, and is to be considered by us as one of those *peculiar motives* of the gospel, intended to enforce and secure them. In this the Apostle is express. *Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and the forgiveness of sins* ‡. 'Tis the prerogative only of the sovereign to extend mercy to offenders, and fix the terms on which that mercy shall be granted. And therefore God, the Sovereign of mankind,

* 1 Pet. iii. 18.

|| Tit. ii. 14.

† Rom. vi. 10, 11.

‡ Acts v. 31.

the great Lord of life and death, hath advanced our Lord Jesus Christ as a *Prince and a Saviour to proclaim mercy to sinners, and determine the conditions of receiving it.* By the *first*, the proclaiming mercy from heaven, he grants the *forgiveness of sins*; and by the *latter*, the fixing the terms of forgiveness, he grants *repentance*, as he declares the necessity and allows the full benefit of it, wherever it is sincere. But there seems to be more intended than this, and the granting repentance seems to imply, that even this proceeds from his power as a *Prince*, as well as the other from his goodness as a *Saviour*. God is expressly said to *give repentance*, as that implies the inward change of the sinner's mind and temper. In *meekness*, saith the Apostle to *Timothy*, *instructing those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth* *. Now God gives all spiritual blessings *by Christ*, and particularly this of repentance, and to give this, he is *exalted to be a Prince and Saviour*; and he gives it by such means as are suitable to the rational natures of men, the passions they are possessed of, and the motives that are fit and proper to influence them. It is ascribed in scripture both to *God and man*, and described as his work and their act, as *given by him*, and *exercised by them*. And both are reconcilable. 'Tis God's gift, as the original principal cause of it, and as all the means and motives that

* 2 Tim. ii. 25.

produce it are from him; and 'tis man's act, as prevailed on by these means and motives of God's providing, to exercise repentance; and because repentance can be his act, and his only, and must be willing and from the heart, to give it any worth, value or efficacy. So that 'tis men who *repent and turn themselves from their transgressions*, because God gives them the inclination and ability, and persuades them to it by such methods as make their repentance and conversion to him, though his act, yet their voluntary act and deed also.

And because preaching the gospel, which is instructing others in the great principles and duties of it, is so natural a means to recover men from their sins, and reconcile them to their duty; hence our blessed Lord, after his resurrection, commissioned his disciples to *preach repentance and remission of sins in his name* †, as what was the peculiar mission on which they were sent, and the principal duty of their apostolic office and character. And this is now the great duty of the gospel ministry, and the standing *ordinary means* whereby sinners are to be brought home, and by which *Christ as a Prince gives repentance*. 'Tis God's method to promote our salvation, how foolish and contemptible a one soever it may appear to *sensual* men, who if they absent themselves from the institution of Christ, and will not attend with a serious mind the ministration of his word, evidently omit the

† Luke xxiv. 47.

means of instruction and reformation, and have no reason to expect any extraordinary methods of conviction and conversion, who cast contempt on the ordinary and stated ones. *The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonas †*, and the idolatrous Gentiles were converted by the preaching of the Apostles, and many of the worst of sinners have in all ages been reclaimed from their vices, and made sincere converts to religion and virtue by the same method; and if the ministers are faithful to their trust, and their respective flocks *attentive* as they should be to the sacred truths they hear, and *receive them with faith and love*; the gospel that is preached to them will be attended with its original power, and prove finally effectual to all the purposes of repentance and salvation. Ordinarily, men are to expect no miraculous efforts from heaven, no preternatural appearances for their conviction and conversion: When the rich man in the place of torment prayed that *Abraham* would send *Lazarus* to his brethren, to prevent their falling into the same condemnation with himself †, *Abraham* replies: *They have Moses and the prophets **, *Let them hear them §*. And when *Dives* urged, *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went to them from the dead they will repent ||*: *Abraham* replies: *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, viz. to repent, though one rose from the dead ††*. The plain

† Matt. xii. 41 † Luke xvi. 27. * Ver. 28. Ver. 29.
 || Ver. 30. †† Ver. 31.

doctrine of which parable is this: That the *standing means* appointed by divine revelation, to recover men from their sins, and prevent their misery, are *abundantly sufficient*; that no extraordinary methods are to be expected, and that generally speaking, where these ordinary ones are found finally ineffectual, through the obstinacy of finners, *extraordinary ones* for the same reason would prove also *insufficient*. And this is more especially the case with the ordinary means of repentance and conversion under the gospel, because where they are attended with a due sense of their worth, and a real desire to profit by them, they will be ever accompanied with all those influences of the Spirit of God, which are necessary to give them their saving efficacy, and to produce every good fruit that God intended by the appointment of them. And how excellent an encouragement, how prevalent a motive is this, immediately to set about repenting and returning to God, that 'tis what *Christ is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour* to vouchsafe; that he hath appointed powerful and effectual means to produce it; and that he will *secure the event* by his blessing on those means, if with a right mind we attend to and improve them. Upon these considerations the difficulty of repentance immediately lessens. Conversion to God is practicable and comparatively easy. Christ will prosper his own means, and they shall prove ineffectual to none, who don't themselves prevent the proper influence of them.

6. Again, that part of *Christ's mediation* that consists in his being appointed to be the *judge of the world*, is a very important and awful *motive* to repentance. This is particularly mentioned and enforced in my text: For thus the Apostle declares to the *Athenians*: *God now commandeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, even by Jesus Christ, whom he hath raised from the dead.* What consideration can more nearly affect us than this? What can demonstrate in a more lively manner the indispensable necessity we are all under, of bringing forth fruits meet for repentance?

God will judge the world. He hath absolutely fixed the day, *i. e.* the time and season when this solemn transaction shall take place; when his high tribunal shall be erected, when all men shall stand before it, and the whole world shall receive its doom from his decisive sentence. Man, as such, is by his nature accountable, in the far greatest part of his character is accountable to none but God, many even of his actions not falling under human notice, others of them not being considered by human laws, and his whole inward frame and temper not being cognizable by any human tribunal. But all these things are open to God, who being the supreme, the universal Sovereign, is therefore supreme, universal Judge, to whom all must give an account of themselves. Persons of all ranks and conditions,

tions, rich and poor, high and low, good and bad, are all equally reserved for this important day, and nothing shall excuse them, no pretended privilege, exempt them from appearing at his bar.

But how shall God, the *invisible* God, judge the children of men? How can they appear before him, who is of no form, no shape, who can be likened to nothing, and who by the immensity of his nature fills heaven and earth with his presence? Christianity rationally resolves this difficulty, by assuring us, that *the Father judges no man, viz. personally, but hath committed all judgment to the Son* *: Or in the words of my text, *God will judge the world by that man, even Jesus Christ*, whom he hath appointed to carry on and finish this awful solemnity; by that man, who in another character is the Son of God, and by his near relation and perfect resemblance to his Father, is worthy the high and honourable character and title of God; by him incarnate, dwelling in a visible body of glory, surrounded with his majesty, invested with his authority, and filled with the fulness of his Godhead; by him as a great vicegerent and deputy, encircled with all the treasures of his wisdom and knowledge; by him thus qualified for executing this god-like office, God will judge the world, every individual that hath lived, or shall live in it, till the final conclusion of its present state, and the consummation of

* John v. 22.

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all things. But how will God judge the
world by Christ?

The answer is *in righteousness*; according to
the truth of their character, and the nature
of their actions; for thus only can they be
judged in righteousness, or according to the
rules of justice and equity. Nothing else can
come under the examination and censure of
God or man, but what *men* actually *are* and
do; and therefore for both these they must
give an account of themselves at his future
tribunal. Though the inward springs of
actions, the passions, motives, views, pur-
poses, and resolutions that govern them, are
not the subject of human enquiry, as lying
too deep and concealed to come under human
inspection; revelation informs us, that in
this day of account *God will judge the secrets
of men by Jesus Christ, according to his gospel* *.
Though mens *words* and speeches are gene-
rally such as that they cannot, without innu-
merable inconveniencies be taken notice of by
any earthly courts, and though few of us are
so cautious in this respect, as prudence and in-
terest require us to be; yet how awful is that
assurance of our blessed Lord: *By thy words
thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou
shalt be condemned* †; and those words of the
Apostle, who assures us, *that the Lord shall
come with ten thousand of his saints, to execute
judgment upon all, and to convict all that are
ungodly, not only of their ungodly deeds, but of*

* Rom. ii. 16.

† Matt. xii. 37.

all their hard speeches †, their rude, reproachful speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. And though many of our most considerable actions are concealed from public notice, and pass unregarded by human laws; yet this future tribunal will bring them all into examination, and judge us according to the nature of them, whether good or evil, and *render to all, for there is no respect of persons with God, according to their deeds*; and by these determine our everlasting state, either for *indignation and wrath*, or for *glory, honour, and immortality*.

If we now reflect upon this doctrine, what motive can be offered to you, of greater importance in itself, or more strongly adapted to affect, and impress us, to excite in us a godly sorrow for our past sins, to inspire us with resolution and strength to break off our sinful habits, and to engage us to return to a wiser and better course of life for the future? “Why should I harbour these *criminal affections and inclinations*, that I have been so long a slave to, when God by Jesus Christ will *bring me into judgment for them*? This pride, this passion, this love of vanity and sinful pleasure, this habit of intemperance, this sensuality and disposition to undue indulgence, this covetous, sordid, selfish spirit, this envious, malicious, uncharitable frame, this disregard to sacred things, this inward aversion to devotion and piety, this indifference to the

† Jude 15.

worship of God, and reluctance to pray to and praise him, of one or more of which I have been so long under the power; why should I cherish them any longer? Can I secrete the knowledge of them from God? Can I cast a veil over them to disguise them at his tribunal? Can I persuade the impartial Judge to pass them by unnoticed and unconcerned? Oh! No. My heart is open to his inspection, and my inmost frame is more perfectly understood, and more clearly and impartially discerned by him than by myself. For these errors of my heart I must account to him, and all that passeth in my breast will have its share in fixing my future everlasting state, by the righteous award that he will pronounce." Will not such a view of things cause the sinner immediately to cry out: *Create in me, O Lord, a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me?* Will it not inspire the resolution, and convey the necessary strength, to break off his sinful habits, to bring his passions and appetites under restraints, and to alter the whole frame and temper of his mind, that he may not appear in this disordered, corrupted, criminal state, before the awful tribunal of his God?

The same considerations, duly impressed by reflection and prayer on his mind, will, under the divine blessing, which God is always ready to give to them that fervently ask it, become effectual to correct the errors of the sinner's *conversation*, and recover him from the practice of every evil way. For if
this

this thought was but habitual; for these *sinful words*, for these *criminal pursuits and indulgences*, my God will enter into judgment with me; these are things by which my future state must be determined; eternal life, or everlasting death will be the sure consequences of my present actions, it would naturally excite such an habitual awe, caution and fear in the mind, as would be a great preservative from these excesses; it would help men to curb the very first tendencies to them; it would make them careful to keep out of the way of temptation, and to avoid all occasions that might draw them into sin, and arm them with resolution and firmness of mind successfully to resist, and finally to overcome every solicitation and inducement, willingly to offend, and expose themselves to the righteous judgment of God. No stronger motives can be offered to sinners, to influence them to a serious and hearty repentance, than those that are thus derived from the mediation of Christ, unless we add

7. In the last place, the *inestimable benefits* consequent upon, and connected with the *exercise of it*, by the express constitution and grant of God in the gospel revelation. And these are many of the noblest and most valuable kind;

Particularly the *remission of sins*, or the plenary forgiveness of all the past transgressions of their lives. The errand on which *John* was sent was to *preach the baptism of repentance*

ance for the remission of sins *. When the Jews asked Peter and the Apostles, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* the Apostles by Peter answered: *Repent and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins* †. And a little after: *Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out* ‡. And when our blessed Lord gives, as a Prince and Saviour, *repentance*, he also gives *the remission of sins* §. And he commanded his Apostles, *to preach in his name to all nations, repentance and the forgiveness of sins* ||. And other places might be mentioned. This therefore is the connection made by the mercy and grace of God; that repentance and conversion from sin, which is effected by the reception and belief of the gospel, shall universally be available to the remission of all the past sins of life with which men are chargeable in the sight of God; not from any merit in the sinner's conversion, or because his repentance obliges God in honour and equity wholly to remit the punishment due to past sins; but because this change in his heart and life is the only natural, rational preparative for God's mercy, and renders the sinner, what otherwise he would not be, capable of forgiveness. God's goodness is indeed *free*, and *he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy*, be directed by none in the exercise of it. But even in this he consults the *honour* of his cha-

* Luke iii. 3. † Acts ii. 38. ‡ Acts iii. 19. § Acts v. 31.
|| Luke xxiv. 47.

rafter, the *purity* of his nature, and dispenses his grace so as may best answer the *ends of his government*, and as is most suitable to the circumstances of those to whom he grants it; and he hath therefore connected repentance and remission together, because though repentance hath not in its nature any thing of *merit*, yet 'tis a *preparation* for mercy in the sinner, and a *natural motive* to the exercise of mercy in the mind of God, and renders the display of it a wise and proper act in the divine government. In consequence of this forgiveness of sin,

Iniquity shall not be the final destruction of the repentant, converted, pardoned sinner. Pardon cancels every obligation to punishment, and absolves him entirely from all the threatened penalties of sin; so that he hath no more to fear from the consequences of his past transgressions, than if he had never committed them. The ruin that was before him, whilst in an unpardoned state, immediately vanishes, when God cheers the heart with the voice of pardon, and as the hope of mercy grows more firm and lively, the terrors of guilt and the apprehensions of destruction gradually abate; and he hath nothing to fear from a reconciled and forgiving God. For this is the promise of his own goodness: *Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin* *; and if God is not willing that any should

* Ezek. xviii. 30.

perish, but that all should come to repentance †, as the Apostle tells us, then whosoever are prevailed on thus to repent, God will not suffer finally to perish. So far from this, as that

Lastly, it *restores the sinner to life*, and to all the *forfeited privileges and benefits* of life; reverses the attainer incurred by sin, and recovers the offender by a new title and grant to all the honours, immunities, and possessions essential to the happiness of his nature. Yea, so substantial a benefit is the remission of sins, as described by the gospel, and so very valuable the fruits of a real conversion to God, as that 'tis attended with a *right to eternal salvation*, and to the possession of *immortal life* ‡. For 'tis *repentance unto salvation*, and God gave the Gentiles *repentance unto life* ||; 'tis attended with present salvation from the displeasure of God, and all the effects of his anger; and secures eternal salvation from the punishment of eternal death, by a resurrection to glory, honour and immortality, in the presence and heavenly kingdom of God, where the worth of God's pardoning grace shall be fully understood, and the everlasting possession of all the benefits of salvation shall inspire the heart with a gratitude that shall never cease, and be the source of eternal thanksgivings and praises to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever. And can the

† 2 Pet. iii. 9. ‡ 2 Cor. vii. 10. || Acts ix. 18.

sinner need any better, any more cogent and powerful motive to amendment and reformation? Is it a contemptible blessing, that of the remission of all thy sins, thy deliverance from every guilty obligation, thy freedom from the penalty of eternal punishment, thy rescue from destruction, the redemption of thy soul from all the endless miseries of a future state, thy restoration to the forfeited favour and acceptance of God, thy being invested with a right to a glorious resurrection, to an heavenly life, and to that salvation which includes in it every thing that thy nature can want, thy best and largest desires can aspire after, and that the infinite goodness and wisdom of God can bestow? Consider what are the forfeitures thou incurrst, and the blessings thou lovest by an obstinate continuance in sin. Impress thy heart with a just and lively sense of the true worth and importance of the benefits that are connected with repentance, and the remission of sins. Compare them with an impartial and honest mind to the pleasures and advantages of a sinful life, and then pass the true judgment, which claim thy preference, which best deserve thy affection and care. Is it worth thy while to risk the happiness, to forfeit the salvation of thy immortal soul, to sacrifice the peace and friendship of God, the pleasures of reconciliation to and hope in him, the life of Angels, the joys of heaven, and the glories of immortality, for pleasures that last but for a moment, that *perish in the using*,
that

that introduce pollution, guilt and horrors into thy breast, that prepare thee for, and finally, without repentance, will involve thee in total and irreparable destruction? Seriously recollect thyself, give way to these reflections, till thou findest within thyself the disposition and resolution to arise, and call upon thy God for mercy; till thy heart relents, and thou art persuaded to return to thy Father, and say to him: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son*; till thou findest that godly sorrow arise within thee which becomes thy unhappy condition; that hatred of sin which so destructive and unnatural an evil deserves; that resolution of forsaking it which is necessary to thy deliverance from the power of it; that change of thy heart, and alteration of thy life, which is an unalterable preparative for the mercy of God, and the joys of his salvation. And when thou canst say, *I am changed from my former self, God hath at length prevailed over me to return to him, his goodness hath triumphed over the obstinacy of my heart, and his grace softened and subdued it into a real repentance and conversion*; then also mayest thou apply those comfortable and reviving words: *There is mercy for me with my God that he may be feared; there is with him forgiveness of my sins, and even plenteous redemption.*

And though repentance be a work of great difficulty, especially in the case of long accustomed and habitual sinners, yet let not even this

this discourage thee. Use carefully and faithfully the means appointed for thy recovery, and they shall prove finally effectual. Strengthen thy endeavours *by calling on God*, and secure his aid by a constant dependence on *that grace*, which he is ready to give to *help thee, in every time of need*. Cherish every good impression and conviction of thy mind, and God will preserve them from being lost; for *he will not quench the smoking flax*, nor suffer the bruised reed to be broken; but will preserve those good beginnings, which his own word and Spirit have implanted, gradually improve them, and carry them on till thy victory over sin be compleat, and he hath fully restored thee to peace and safety in his acceptance and favour.

And as to those of you, whom God hath *actually recovered* from the snares of sin, or mercifully preserved from the great corruptions of it, take the pleasure and comfort that arises from so happy a state; *rejoice in God*, and feed your mind with the sure prospect of life and glory. If the change in you be real, and you are thoroughly converted to God, let it be your care to *improve it to still farther perfection*. 'Tis not so universal and compleat in any, but it may be still farther advanced. Repentance is really the work of life, as we have all many errors to lament, many defects to cure, and many farther degrees of the divine nature and image to attain to. Let it therefore be our ambition to recover entirely the rectitude of our nature,
and

and to extirpate every latent seed, every remainder of sin, every fibre of this *root of bitterness* within us; that by an increasing conformity to God in purity of heart and holiness of life, we may enjoy ourselves with greater satisfaction, and converse with God with an higher pleasure, and when we come to the close of life, leave the world with triumph, and say: *I am justified, I am sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Spirit of my God: Thanks be to the Father, who hath made us meet for the inheritance of saints in light.*

END of the SECOND VOLUME.



